

# Health Seeking Behaviours Among Mishings Of Bamun Doloni Village Of Lakhimpur District, Assam

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## ABSTRACT

“Health and Disease” are very often considered to be the polar word. Medical anthropology emerged basically with the study of health care system prevalent in the societies. In different parts of the world man devise numerous mechanisms for ensuring health and eliminating disease. Concept of health and illness are not universal in natural and content. These vary from society to society; culture to culture. Different studies conducted among the different groups of people in regards reveal that every human community has its emic views with regards to health, disease and disease-etiology. This fact is relatively more conspicuous in the traditional societies, especially in the simpler ones. The present study conducted among the Mishings of Bamun Doloni village of Lakhimpur district, Assam. In the study an attempt has been made to understand the socio-cultural dimension of the health as well as the traditional health care practices of the people. Various methods and techniques were applied depending on the nature of enquiry.

Keyword: Health, disease, illness, traditional health care, treatment.

## Introduction

The health behaviour of a community includes system of belief in relation to disease and causation of diseases, methods of treatment, housing, sanitation and personal hygiene, food habit, child rearing practices, etc. which constitute an aspect of culture of community. The culture has also strong bearing on the health behaviour of the community. The whole range of the health behaviour can be called be as Health culture.

Health is one of the most important aspects of community development and family welfare. It is also indispensable part of the day-to-day life of an individual as well as community. In the preamble of the character for health development, signed by India on 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1980, it is stated' "A nation's greatest asset to its people, the more so when they are endowed with highest attainable standard of health which promotes dynamism, determination, productivity and self-confidence to move ahead... It is also indispensable for a balanced development of the individuals within the family as part of community and the nation." (Mahler, 1980: 116)

Illness as well as disease is old as the presence of human being on the earth. There is must something about the treatment of the disease or curing of the illness in pre-historic time too. The system might have been socio-religious, magical or herbal rather than the modern ones that we have today. To modern man of advanced civilization, medicine is about to prevention and treatment of disease and injury. To prehistoric man, however it had a much broader meaning. It was a concept that included not only health and the cure or prevention of illness, but direction of good or bad fortune, success or failure in the hunt, war, love and revenge, the attainment of the desirable prevention of the undesirable influences over fellow men, animals, nature, spirit and Gods. These goals were achieved more often through the use of intervention of the supernatural than through or scientific means. The earliest attempts to combat illness seem to have developed in two directions; magical and empirical. Often in prehistoric times, the practitioner had to be not only an expert in healing, but a medicine man, shaman, sorcerer, priest and magician, hypnotist. Medicine, magic and religion were so closely interlinked that now in retrospect, it cannot be determined

where one began and other ended. (Ritter and Ritter, 1976: 139-144)

The forgoing discussion makes it apparent that concepts, belief and ideas associated with health vary from society to society and knowledge about various concepts of disease and healing in various communities is very essential for medical practitioners and all other persons directly or indirectly involved in health delivery programme and anthropological studies of the communities are immense help in this direction. Even otherwise, Cultural anthropology has always exercised notable influences upon the field of health and medicines. A well-integrated study highlighted the health culture of a community has also a tremendous important to make the modern health services acceptable to the member of the community to maximum possible level. An empirical investigation regarding basic concept of health, disease and sanitation etc. is also essential to acquire significant variation from society to society. The present study focus on the traditional health care practices of Mishing community of Bamun Doloni village of Lakhimpur district, Assam.

#### Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are given below-

- 1) To understand the overall living conditions, personal hygiene and environmental sanitation prevalent among the people of the study area.
- 2) To understand their traditional healing practices of different diseases.

#### Methodology

The most important aspect of any scientific study is its methods, without which no method of investigation or experiments will be fruitful. Methodology is referred to as the procedures, rules, techniques and the stages of conducting experiment and gathering data. A pilot survey in the studied area was done associated with their traditional cultural practices and social norms, in the context of their livelihood. In the time of fieldwork, various methods and techniques were applied depending on the nature of enquiry. Survey method was applying for gathering the demographic data. Beside this, the other methods and techniques in the research work. The methods were observation, structured and unstructured interview,

collection of concrete case, informal discussion, etc. Based on the specific nature of data some relevant persons and sources were contacted. Information of the personal hygiene were gathered through observation and interview. To acquire data on the Medicare system extensive interviews and observation were undertaken. The descriptive and interpretive has been done depending upon etic and emic nature of data.

## Results and discussion

### The perception of health and disease among villagers

In the study area 'health' is considered as absence of any kind of disease (physical, mental, social and spiritual). A person free from any kind of disease is health. Therefore, they believed that the performance of religious activities can satisfy the God and Goddesses who are responsible for particular disease. The villagers have good knowledge of common disease and their remedial response in the form of herbs, roots, and shoots of plants. They are confident to treat the patient suffering from fever, cold, cough, headache, stomach disorder, injuries, etc.

Belief in Mantras are important aspects of traditional health care system of the village. When somebody fall in ill which is not cure by the doctor then they contact the Bej (medicine man) for help. He diagnoses the cause of the illness through divination. At the time of divination, he invokes the dead ancestors and Gods, through appropriate spells and incantation.

Every human community has its own nation regarding health and health seeking behaviour which is referred to as health culture. In the study area, the Mishings people live in pile dwelling kachcha houses prepared by bamboo and which generally does not have any window or other means of ventilation, but, the inter-space between the bamboo's splits of the un-plastered walls of the house, by and large, serve the purpose of ventilation. There is no separate room for kitchen. Beside due to scarcity of space they keep their domesticated animals like pigs, ducks, goats, etc. are under to their pile house which may affect the health of the people.

Washing of face and cleaning of teeth are not regular. Some people are using bamboo twig, coal, and also tooth brush, etc. They brush their teeth once a day in the

morning and they have not habit of cleaning their teeth after meals. Shaving of beard once a week is usual practices. Nails are trimmed after 7 to 10 days.

Another aspect of health culture, food and intoxication, have a direct influence on the status of individuals and community health. The Mishings take food three times a day. They have a mixed diet of rice, vegetables, fish, meat, etc. Smoking of tobacco are taken by the male only but some of the female takes tobacco with betel nut. Apung (rice beer) is consumed by both male and female. Awareness of harmful effects of liquor is seen among some of them.

Another important aspect influence health culture is that age at marriage of boys and girls in the family. It was found from investigation that the total age at married men is found in the age group of 25 to 30 and females between the age group of 20 to 25. The villagers think that early marriage of women, as compared to man, is necessary to deliver a healthy child.

The process of family planning is influencing by the modern health care system. In the village, both male and female are aware of family planning method. As found from the investigation both male and female used contraceptives for birth control.

The source of water in the village are tube-well. The system of purification of water is very much neglected by the people of the villagers. For drinking, washing, cooking and even bathing purpose water from tube-well is commonly used by the villagers. Drainage system is absent in the village. Even in the summer, stagnant water around tube-well is noticed which serves as a breeding place for mosquitoes. Number of unclean tanks and cow-dung pits near the house are the breeding places of mosquitoes. During monsoon season become extremely unhygienic.

Interaction between traditional and modern health behaviour

There is a common belief that Mishings are inclined towards traditional Medicare system. This inclination, it is said, is existent even in the presence of modern medicine facilities. This part is to analysis of how far the belief is true in the Mishings village of Bamun Doloni. Among the Mishings have been found to suffer from disease like

dysentery, cholera, general weakness, chicken pox, malaria, jaundice, paralysis, pneumonia, gastric, indigestion, vomiting, etc. Despite the improvement of medical facilities in the form of modern medicines and improved equipment, the villagers still believed in local medicine men. The people of the village believed that the local medicine men have special powers for curing disease. Most of them treatment of disease is mostly sought through supernatural means-prayers, sacrifices, mantras, offerings and so on. Usually, they go to hospital but some disease like dog bite, pneumonia, jaundice, chicken pox, dysentery and vomiting, etc are prefer to go through traditional healing practices. The villagers use both herbal and Magico-religious treatment of disease. However, the influence of the modern medicine has improved the concept of disease and its treatment to which it has observed that because of faster change among the Mishings of the study area. Simultaneously application of both the system of medicine has been reported by some respondents. This perhaps is due to lack of knowledge. The respondents have been found to do so for hope quick result.

Apart from the modern health care system, the Mishings under investigation have their own traditional measures with regard to health care. The traditional Medicare system of the people broadly belongs to two types, namely, magico-religious and herbal medicine. As matter of fact, in their traditional system, they can take recourse, not only to curative measure but also to preventive.

In the village there is one herbal medicine man so, the people relies on him who gives his service to entire village and also the other neighbouring villages. While curing the patient, he does not demand any money. But after gives his best, whatever is provided by the affected patient he received. He considered this expertise as a gift of almighty as well as their forehead. Some of the disease that is cured by herbal medicine is as follows-

Asthma (nga-nam)

To get relief from asthma for some extend is intake 3 drops of Akon leaf with a cup of milk after meal every day.

Cough (sagre)

To get relief from the cough pure honey is used extensively. It is said to be more useful in the cough of babies. The adult takes in the form of paste made out of gingers and kind of turmeric (kula-halodi).

#### Diarrhoea (aki-gidung)

Intake of lemon juice or lime pickle is believed to bring relief from diarrhoea. The herbs locally known as durun-bon and manimuni are also taken as vegetable for purpose.

#### Fever (ramnam)

In common fever, water boiled with coriander seeds (dhania) is taken as medicine for two or three times a day.

#### Eye infection

To get relief from eye problem, a kind of wild herbs known as Konaihimola should apply as eye drops.

#### Fracture(harbhoga)

The gum of Dimoru tree in the affected area and then banded with it till 3 to 7 days.

#### Jaundice

Jaundice is another acute health problem of the study area. The basic symptom is yellowish pigmentation of the skin. In this regards intake sugarcane juice is better for recovery of the patient. Again, the juice from the medicine plant like gorukhis which is mixed with curd and take with empty stomach for cure.

#### Lake of supply of breast milk (anyuk-gakhir-piram nam)

The lactating mothers are provided with chicken curry with containing sufficient amount of papaya for purpose of increasing the breast milk. Another few wild leaves i.e., ngerck, takpang, etc. and some spices like black paper, garlic, salt are also added to make it more effective one.

#### Mensural problem ( prokota)

The abnormalities in mensural discharge of the females are also treated by some herbal medicinal plant like

jetuka, Khehraj, manimuni are mixed together and make a juice which should take at the time of mensural time.

#### Pneumonia

Medicine for the disease is prepared by grinding the leta guti and jaluk is mixed with a glass of warm water along with pinch of salt which should be take in empty stomach.

#### Pain (Kinam)

For heavy pain such as headache, ribs pain, pelvic pain, bone joint pain etc. is treated by oil that prepared by out the fats of the pork meat. It is preserved for years. It is applied on the affected area by rubbing to get relief from the pain.

#### Piles (Kesumuria)

Medicine for the disease is prepared by consume tablet from bon jaluk, huwani, kehraj and manimuni, etc. which take with empty stomach for three days.

#### Stomach pain and indigestion (aoid-rockanam)

To get relief from indigestion and stomach pain, a kind of wild herb known as durun-bon is taken as vegetable. The people also use to take juice of lemon for some time.

#### Urinal trouble

Urinal trouble is common health problem in the village. The ailment is cured by drinking juice extracted from the leaves of dupor-tenga.

**Table I: Some of the medicinal plants used by the Mishings of the study area**

Sl. No	Local Name	English Name	Scientific Name	Ailment
1	Take	Ginger	Zinziber offcinal	Cough
2	Batten Manimuni	Indian pennywort	Centella Asiatic	Stomach disorder
3	Mantur	Heliotrope	Helitropium indicum	Septic
4	Takuk	Fig tree	Ficus glomerate	Fracture
5	Dupor-tenga	Sprout leaf plant	Bryophyllum pinnatum	Urinary trouble
6	Drun-bon	Line leaf leucus	Leucas Linifolia	Stomach pain and indigestion

7	Bugjar	Mock-strawberry	Duchesenea indica	Jaundice
8	Halodi	Turmeric	Curuma longa	Gastric
9	Yakan digne	Piper	Piper Nigram	Pneumonia
10	Konaihimala	Climbing dayflower	Commelina diffusa	Eye infection
11	Keraj	False daisy	Eclipta prostate	Eye injuries
12	Leta-aming	Knicker nut	Caesalpinia bonducella	Cough and pneumonia
13	Modhuhuleng	Chinese knotweed	Polygonum Chinese	Toothache
14	Paan	Betel leaf	Piper betel	Pneumonia
15	Sirata	Chirreta	Andrographis paniculate	Pneumonia
16	Tulsi	Basil tree	Ocimum santum	Cough
17	Sorii	Elegant Tape Vine	Stephania elegans	Mensural pain
18	Jetuka	Henna	Lawsonia inermis	Mensural irregularities
19	Negrak	Taro leaf	Colocasia esculenta	Mensural irregularities

#### The Magico-Religious practices of the study area

There are some symptoms that are believed to be caused either by wrath of some deity or due to the influence of some evil spirit and evil eyes. These diseases are treated by some magico-religious practices. Some of them are-

#### Pox (Aie)

Pox is believed to be act by deity Aie. To get relief from the suffering the individuals should be worshipped and appeased. Here the medicine man performs a vital role by doing some ritual on the name of the deity. A pair of beetle nut is offered to appease the deity. After cure the affected family member offers a small feast to the neighbour which contain sweet rich made of milk and dry fruits.

#### Influence the evil eye (much-loga)

There is a belief among the people that some individuals have some evil power. Hence, if he or she watches someone with evil motives, it may cause illness. Generally, the minor and the beautiful girls easily become the victim of such persons. Generally, it causes indigestion, diarrhoea, fever, vomiting, etc. So, in this regard the

medicine man uses betel leaf which ripped with mustered oil and chant some Mantras and rubbed the betel leaf all over the body of the affected person and then the leave it to be burned to get relief.

One sided headache (huruj kopali)

The people have the belief that half headache is caused due to the sun deity. But the nature of the fault that results in his ailment is not known to them. They considered that the fault may be done ignorantly by them during their day-to-day life that makes the deity annoyed. They preferably consult the socio-religious or magical practitioner for curative measure. The medicine man usually chants Mantras on a small quantity of water and provides the patient for taking at regular interval for a specific period.

### **Conclusion**

The findings demonstrated that the overall living condition and health behaviour and practices of the villagers is poor because of many factors like beliefs, superstitions, poverty, ignorance, illiterate, lack of adequate knowledge on certain things and objects, old habits and climatic conditions, etc. are some barriers for achieving development in their living condition. The Sanitation and drainage system of the surroundings areas is poor to which the villagers suffer from many diseases due to unhygienic condition of their surrounding areas. The change of health behaviour towards the accepting modern medicines does not mean that the traditional system of belief and health behaviour has withered away from the society. The degree of changes and persistence of traditional belief and health behaviour largely depend on the nature of easy availability of modern services.

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