

ETHNOBOTANICAL STUDIES OF SANTALS AND PAHARIAS OF JHARKHAND

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Abstract

Rich cultural heritage, immense geographical variations, the newly formed 28th state of India, Jharkhand, got its independent status on 15th Nov 2000. The name Jharkhand means "The region of bushes or forests." It shares border with Bihar in the North, Orissa in South, West Bengal in the East and Chhatisgarh and Uttar Pradesh in the west, the state languages are Hindi, Santhali, Mundari and Ho. Bangia and Orrisa are also used. The state has 22 districts (Sahebganj, Pakur, Dumka, Devghar, Godda, Kodarma, Hazaribagh, Chatra, Bokaro, Dhanbad, East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Ranchi, Gumla, Lohardaga, Palamu, Garhwa, Latehar, Jamtara, Simdega, Saraikela) with its Capital at Ranchi. The population of the state is around 2.7 crores, while the Tribal population is 10.7 lakh which is 26% of the total population of the state. Jharkhand which is peopled, by and large, by about 30 different tribal communities could be divided into two parts, on the basis of the population with Santhal tribe being the largest tribe, followed by Oraon (Kurukh) the second largest and Munda tribe the third largest tribe. Besides these there are the tribes of HO, Kharia, Paharia, Asur, Birhor, Lohra, Machlichik Barik, Korba etc. One for major Tribes have been taken into consideration for the purpose of this study. These four tribes are Oraon (Kurukh), Munda, Santhal and HO.

Key Words: Ethnobotany, tribal communities, Santhal, Paharia, Jharkhand.

Introduction:

Jharkhand which is peopled, by and large, by about 30 different tribal communities could be divided into two parts, on the basis of the population with Santhal tribe being the largest tribe, followed by Oraon (Kurukh) the second largest and Munda

tribe the third largest tribe. Besides these there are the tribes of HO, Kharia, Paharia, Asur, Birhor, Lohra, Machlichik Barik, Korba etc. One for major Tribes have been taken into consideration for the purpose of this study. These four tribes are Oraon (Kurukh), Munda, Santhal and HO. The tribals of this state generally belong to the proto-Australoid stock though traces of Mongoloid strain have been found in parts of Santhal parganas. They are of average height, dark brown in colour and generally healthy. Each community has its distinctive culture and institutions. Although the social intercourse between the tribals and non-tribal in the region has not been unrestricted, the acculturation on the linguistic level is as remarkable as the extent of Miscegenation on the ethnic level. The tribals differ widely among themselves in the level of socio-economic development. The number of people living entirely by hunting and food gathering is very small, there are, however, a few tribal communities still devoted to shifting cultivation. These are Asur, Birjia, still Kharia and Sauria Paharia. The rest of the tribals who form 95% of the tribal population are settled agriculturists engaged in plough, cultivation. As in their economic organization, so also in their world-view, tradition orientation and commitment to their past, the tribals differ among themselves. In some cases their level of socio-cultural integration is low, in others it is vigorous and potent. Among some, their cultural institutions are extremely simple, among others they are highly complex and elaborate. Some have very simple religious beliefs and rituals, while others have a plethora of gods and goddesses. Most of them subscribe to belief in witchcraft and sorcery. Severe penalty is prescribed in tribal social code for persons found guilty of these offences.

Materials and Methods: The ethnobotanical survey and studies were conducted in districts of Jharkhand viz. Ratu, Kanke, Lapung, Namkum, Ormanjhi, Sonahatu and Tamar blocks of Ranchi District and Nala, Kundahit, Narayampur, Mihijam, Fatehpur, Jamtara and Karmatar blocks of Jamtara District. The study shows that Paharias are the largest tribe in Ranchi district followed by the Oraons and the Lohras. In Jamtara district Santhal is the largest tribe. The tribal population of Jamtara district is 35.51% of the total population. The plants, their use as ethnomedicinal system, plant parts used, mode of preparation, locality of use and the particular group of tribals using the medicines were studied. Plant specimens were collected and documented in frequent field visits conducted from 2007-2011. The places of visit were the tribal villages of Jharkhand. The villages were visited in different seasons (summer, monsoon and winter) to avail most of the plant resources in their flowering conditions. In the actual method of field studies, informants from different

tribes who are familiar with the plants and their use by the members of their respective communities were selected by carefully taken interviews. Questions, problems and suggestions were put to them regarding the use of plants and their products in folk medicine and other uses. Mounted herbarium specimens known to grow in this area were placed to them and questions were asked on their usefulness. These were subsequently verified by taking them to field to identify plants on the basis of local tribal names previously noted from them. Local names and the areas were noted. Prior permission was taken from the informants for recording of the information. Photographs were taken of the plants and their uses. A large number of plants were collected to prepare herbarium.

Results and Discussion: Among all the tribes of Jharkhand Santhal and Paharias were taken into consideration.

1. Santhal: The Sathals are the largest of the tribes of eastern India besides Jharkhand and Bihar, a sizable number of Santhals are found in the adjoining districts of Bangal and Orissa. In Jharktiand they are concentrated in a large number in the districts of Santhal pargama, Dhanbad, Hazaribagh, Sighbhum, Ranchi, and Palomu where as in Bihar, they are found in the district of Monghyre, Bhagalpur and Purnea. The traditions of the Santhals represent them as a racewandering from one land to another until they found their present homeland in Chotanagpur and the adjacent districts. A third theory regards them as being pushed from central alluvial valley of the Ganges to the Hills of Chotanagpur under pressure of the Aryans. A fourth theory credits them with having settled near Mirzapur after coming from the north- east and then being dispersed to Chotanagpur. Whether the Santhals came to the Chotanagpur plateau, from the west, north-east on north-east, cannot however, be conclusively proved on the basis of legend alone (Dutta-Majumdar, 1956:23). About the middle of the 18th century Chotanagpur was the chief habitant of the Santhals. At the end of the center as the jungles were being cleared and the pressure of populations was keenly felt they moved up towards the virgin forest in and around the Raj Mahal Hills. The introduction of Permanent settlement in 1790 in that area inducted the landlords to pay more attention to land improvement and reclamation for which the Santhals were increasingly used. The mainstay of the Santhal is agriculture. The Santhals are divided into twelve patrilineal exogamous groups called Paris. Of these, one is supposed to have disappeared long ago. Each group is known after some iotem and is exogamous. Every part is divided into sub-group called Khut. The number of Khut in various pans varies between

thirteen and twenty eight. Santhal kinship terminology is more descriptive than that of other tribes of Jharkhand.

2. Paharia: Paharias are one of the primitive tribal groups in Santhal Parganas of Jharkhand. They are extremely poor and backward on all human development indicators. Despite being one of the aboriginal people of Santhal region, Paharias are on the verge of extinction because of the apathy of past governments in Jharkhand. The Paharias are divided into two groups:

(i) **The Sauria Paharia people:** (also known as Maler Paharia) are a tribal people of West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand in India. Sauria Paharia are listed as Scheduled Tribe by the Government of West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand. They are found mostly in Santhal Parganas. The Sauria Paharias mainly worship their ancestral spirits, known as Jiwe Urkkya ("the spirit that has left"), especially before sowing a new field. The Jiwe Urkkya is at first a fierce spirit, until a feast is given on the 5th day after the funeral, after which he becomes benevolent. Afterwards, the death anniversary, known as Bhoje, is celebrated by karra puja, animal sacrifices. For the Karra puja, the buffalo is most preferred. The feasts and offerings to ancestors are given by the demano, the village priest, who is believed to speak with the voices of the Jiwe Urkkya. Offerings are typically made during harvest season or during the Bandana festival. Ancestral worship is important for Saurias because they believe that, once he is satiated with offerings, he joins Bero Gosaiyya, the sun god. The Saurias also worship a group of spirits called Gosain. These are associated with every phenomenon in the world around them. The Saurias make a distinction between male and female Gosain, but each village has different conceptions of which Gosain are male and which are female. The names of the Gosain are generally local to their area, and vary depending on the village. The home deity is represented by a door and is worshipped during the construction of a new house. The Gomo (pillar of the house) Gosain provides health and well-being, and the Sohar Gosain lives in the cattle shed and protects the cattle from harm. The Saurias also believe in evil spirits, called Alchi or Bhoote, as well as witchcraft (Chargani). The most important place for veneration of the Gosain is the Manjhi Than, where the most significant Gosain is worshipped. This Gosain is male and is represented by five black stones under a small tree. The Manjhiya makes two sacrifices a year: one during the Bandana festival and just before sowing in a Kurwa field. Female Gosains are worshipped at the Gosain Adda and Bender Nadu, at which are

sacrificed black fowl and pigs respectively. The Chal Nadu, on the nearest hilltop, is the place at which sacrifices are conducted if a calamity befalls the village. Sauria Paharias resort to shifting cultivation. They lead family lives. The Saurias are divided into three distinct cultural groups, namely the Probia, the Bare and the Chete.

(ii)The Mal Paharias: This tribe live in the southern hills of Damin-i-koh and in the south and east of Santhal Parganas have been Hinduised. Among themselves they speak a variety of Bengali, but with others they speak Bengali and Hindi. The Bengali and Devenagari scripts are used by them. The Mal Paharias survive on agriculture and forest produce. Rice is their staple food. Pulses like moong, masur, Kulthi and lar are consumed. They are non-vegetarians, but do not eat beef. Both men and women drink liquor, which may be home-made or bought from the market. They smoke indigenous cheroots, and chew tobacco mixed with lime (khaini) and betel The Mal Paharia people are a tribal people of West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand in India. They are listed as a Scheduled Tribe by the governments of West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand.

Conclusion: The socio-religious activities of tribals centre around plants and flowers has been described by Gupta in 1971. The tribals depend on the traditional medicines for the remedy and cure of diseases. They use different parts of plants during different occasions like birth of child, marriages, worship of gods, worship of spirits, skin diseases and different types of wounds etc. Investigation on such plants may help in getting some effective medicines for different diseases. An authentic investigation has been made with the assistance of educated Santhals and Paharias and a list of plants with medicinal and other properties have been prepared by surveying in sample villages. Some new informations have been obtained and more investigations on such plants may help in getting some effective medicine for different diseases. In conclusion it may be suggested that Santhals of and Paharias have basic as well as practical knowledge of plants passed on through generation from their folk lore, folk tales and religious customs. It is therefore recommended that thorough phytochemical test and pharmaceutical properties should be taken into consideration of above plants so as to ascertain actual medicinal properties of each plant.

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