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Indigenous Health Practices of the Naga People: Continuity and Change

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Abstract

For many indigenous people, health is not merely absence of disease but a state of spiritual, communal, and ecosystem equilibrium and well-being. The indigenous concept of health hence articulates physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional elements, from both individual and communal points of view, and involves political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. The health care activities of the indigenous people are often embedded in the traditional beliefs, customs, folklore, taboos, and prescriptions. Like in most indigenous communities, the living traditions of health care exist in Naga society too, which are passed down orally from generation to generation. They have age-old knowledge of preparation and administration of medicines for different diseases using ingredients sourced from roots, barks, leaves, fruits as well as animal derivatives and other natural minerals. Healing rituals employed for invoking the intervention of supernatural forces are an integral component of the treatment procedure. On the whole traditional medicine helped the Naga people to effectively maintain an efficient health care system long before the arrival of the modern medical system. The current existence of a plurality of health care system in the Naga society brings to the fore the question of relevance and continuity of the indigenous health care system which have served the people well for millennia.

Keywords: Christianization, Indigenous Medicines, Medical Plurality, Nagas, Supernatural

1. Indigenous health practices

The term 'indigenous medicine' or 'indigenous system of health care' refers to the long-standing indigenous system of health care found in the developing countries particularly among indigenous populations. As recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO), for many indigenous people, health is not merely absence of disease (Guite, 2011). Health is a state of spiritual, communal, and ecosystem equilibrium and well-being, which probably explains why traditional pharmacology includes remedy to cure physical ailments. Thus, the indigenous concept of health articulates physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional elements, from both individual and communal points of view, and involves political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. It is shaped by indigenous peoples' historical experiences and worldviews and is expressed in the rules and norms that are applied in the community and practiced by its members. An indigenous community to promote health and prevent illness seeks to recuperate and maintain its interior and exterior equilibrium, including the harmony between community members who are sick and the world around them (UN, 2004).

Indigenous concepts of health and illness are based on and reflect the values, traditions, and beliefs of the people's way of life, or culture. Through time indigenous medicine has sustained itself through processes deeply

rooted in a society's socio-cultural complexes. Indigenous medicinal substances, their nature, axioms, and practices vary from one culture to another (Guite, 2011). The names, practices, and products would be context-specific depending upon the socio-cultural heritage, religion, and political identity of the people practicing it. Generally, the indigenous systems of health care are low cost, locally available treatments which according to World Health Organisation (WHO) are utilized as a source of primary health care by 80 percent of the world's population. The health care activities of the indigenous people are often embedded in traditional beliefs, customs, folklore, taboos, prescription, etc. These are enacted through family networks, health roles, healers, shamans, priests, medicine-man, etc. They have certain age-old techniques and methods of preparation and administration of medicines for different diseases. The ingredients of their medicine include herbs in roots, barks, leaves, fruits, and other plant parts, animal derivatives, and also a few minerals. Healing rituals employed for invoking the intervention of supernatural forces are an integral component of the treatment procedure. For the indigenous peoples, the choice of medical treatment is often explained by the complex understanding of health and the perceived causes of illness. The choice of medical treatment is hence, often related to the perceived cause of illness. Common illness caused by the natural world can be cured by medicinal plants or drugs, whereas illness, caused by spiritual beings can only be cured by the intervention of a traditional healer. When a person gets sick, he/she is often first treated as if the person suffered from a common illness. Plants remedies are administered sequentially or simultaneously often without consultation from any expert. If condition persists, they start being suspicious that the illness is caused by witchcraft, in which case, they seek the help of a treatment and the perceived causes of the illness might be more relevant in the selection of the treatment.

Unlike non-tribal societies, in tribal communities, the concept of etiology of the disease can be broadly divided into natural causation and supernatural causation. Therefore, cultural factors like religion, social status, relationship with the fellow members of the society, nature of the relationship with the supernatural world, etc. plays a decisive role in the evolution of the concept of etiology in a tribal society (Boban K, 1998). Murdock (1980) divided the cause of illness and disease beliefs into two, viz. natural and supernatural. According to Murdock's ill health theoretical model, natural causes include beliefs that the impairment of health is a physiological consequence of some experience of the victim that is consistent with western biomedicine. This broad category includes five distinct types of natural causes of illness: infection, stress, organic deterioration, accident, and overt human aggression. Whereas, supernatural causes rest on supernatural assumptions which modern medical science does not recognize as valid. However, they do fall into three groups: theories of mystical causation (i.e., fate ominous sensation, contagion, and mystical retribution), theories of animistic causation (i.e., soul loss, and spirit aggression), and theories of magical causation (i.e., sorcery and witchcraft).

A common trend in the health, culture, and structure triad is the study of health-seeking behaviour, and the most likely question is how health seekers in different societies make choices about treatment (Sujatha, 2014). In many societies, people follow more than one type of medical system to deal with the illness situation. Even though the modern allopathic system is widely accepted, many countries adopt their own traditional medical systems in addition to modern medicine. Despite being labeled as 'unscientific, many therapies continue to have popularity among health seekers (ibid). According to Gabe, Bury, and Elson, medical pluralism refers to the co-existence in a society of differing medical traditions, grounded in different principles or based on different world-views (in Akram, 2014). Several studies conducted by researchers (Leslie 1976, 1977 and 1980, Nichter 1978, Press 1978, Kleinman 1980, and Young 1983) have shown that the medical system in many places, especially in the developing world, is pluralistic, that is, people use both Western biomedicine and non-Western form of health care in meeting their health needs. For most inhabitants in the developing world, access to biomedicine remains a challenge; hence, people use traditional medicine more frequently because it is more easily accessible. Aside from its easy accessibility, traditional medicine is also embedded in the cultural and the belief system of the indigenous people, thus making it acceptable to them. The Nagas of Northeast India are one such community who for long had a well established but informal indigenous healing system based on their traditional knowledge.

2. Situating the Study

The Naga people or the Nagas as they are colloquially known are an Indo-Mongoloid group of indigenous people speaking the Tibeto-Burmese language. Their homeland stretches along with the northeastern states of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and north western Myanmar (Nagaland State Human Development Report, 2016). Nagaland, the sixteenth State of the Union of India came into being on 1st December, 1963. With a geographical area of about 16, 579 Sq. Km., the state of Nagaland lies between 25°10 N and 27°40 North latitude and 93°20 E and 95°15 East longitude in the northern extension of the Arakan Yoma ranges. Nagaland is a largely mountainous state with altitude rising from the Brahmaputra valley in Assam to an elevation of 3840 metres at Mount Saramati (ibid). Currently, the state of Nagaland consists of eleven districts namely Kohima, Dimapur, Mokokchung, Wokha, Zunheboto, Longleng, Kiphire, Tuensang, Mon, Peren and Phek with a total population of 19,78,502 (2011 Census). Each district has generally predominance/concentration of one of the major tribe of the state, thereby making districts distinct in their linguistic, cultural, traditional and socio-political characteristics. The Nagas do not have a common language or dialect, yet they have similar cultures and traditions. Being primarily agriculturists, every aspect of the Naga life, be it rituals, ceremonies, and festivals, are entwined with agriculture. In the past, the people were largely self-reliant, building their own houses and other functional household articles with locally available resources. They were expert weavers, potters, artisans, and craftsmen weaving their own attires and crafting the weapons and ornaments they needed for sustenance and protection. It is said that until the advent of the British in the 1830s, the Nagas had little contact with the outside world apart from the cultural contact with the Ahoms of Assam.

As such even in terms of healthcare, the people developed a self-reliant system of traditional healing system utilizing resources in their natural environment coupled with spiritual 'interventions' to treat ailments which could not be adequately explained or understood physiologically. The present article thus is an effort to delve into the indigenous health care practices of the Naga People guided by the question of its continuum in the present era of the advanced medical health care system. The findings presented in this article are based on an extensive multisided ethnographic study covering the districts of Tuensang, Mokokchung, Mon, and Phek representing the east, west, north and south zones respectively of the state. From the selected districts, in order to represent both urban and rural populace, respective headquarters along with three villages each were selected from the sample districts. Thus, Tuensang, Mokokchung, Mon, and Phek towns were selected to represent urban areas. From Tuensang district, Tuensang village, Yimrup village and Kejok village were selected as sample representatives for rural areas; Ungma village, Longkhum village and Chuchuyimlang village were selected from Mokokchung district; likewise, Longwa village, Chenwetnyu village and Shangsha village from Mon district and Phek village, Khezhakeno village and Lasumi village from the district of Phek were selected as sample villages respectively. A sample size of 50 respondents each were drawn from the four selected towns, i.e., a total of 200 sample size, whilst from the twelve selected villages a total of 252 sample size were drawn, i.e., of 21 respondents from each village. The method of purposive sampling has been employed to select the respondents representing categories such as traditional health practitioners, village chairmen, knowledgeable elders, as well as the general public.

3. Of Spirits, Healing and the Nagas

The Nagas have a rich knowledge based on their natural resources of indigenous folk medicine which have been handed down through the generations besides the use of natural resources gleaned from their local environment, many of the believed antidotes for various illnesses is connected with magico-religious beliefs and propitiation of supernatural beings and spirits (Thong & Kath 2011). Traditionally there was no binary division between religion and the secular for the Naga people because everyday lives were permeated with spirituality and rituals. They had a belief in gods and spirits, which did not affect the society directly but influenced them in the form of malevolent and benevolent characteristics. Within this cultural milieu, the traditional healers in Naga society occupied a very prominent space. Traditional healers were generally people who were believed to possess special wisdom and strength, possessing a broad knowledge base of the indigenous healing system. Each community of Nagaland had their own terminology for the traditional healers, such as *Saibu* among the Chang Nagas, *Eni* by the Khiamungan Nagas, *Arasener* in Ao Naga, *Wompa* by the Konyak Nagas, etc. Not only did the traditional healers treat the sick with locally sourced medicines, but they were also widely regarded as the

mediators between men and the spirits/gods by the people. It is quite conceivable that for the Nagas any kind of sickness was believed to have been influenced by spirits and deities. Benevolent spirits were thought to be responsible for men's well-being, and blessings, whilst malevolent spirits were responsible for causing suffering to men. They also believed that natural calamities such as earthquake, thunderstorm, fire incident, famine, epidemic disease, sickness, etc. were the wrath and cause of the supernatural powers, deities, and evil spirits. Therefore, pacification was made with animal sacrifices, and food offerings were made to the spirits to placate them. Besides, ceremonies were observed with honour and reverence to gods for positive effect on individual and community life. As a result, at every step of life, they put religion into action in such ways as sacrifices, the performance of rite and abstention from work or *genna* days. Thus, the main concept of traditional Naga belief was concentrated on three things, that is, to escape the wrath of malevolent spirits from disease and death, to ward off the evil spirits through pacification, and appeasement to maximize good harvest and win their goodwill.

In the days of yore, Naga people's ways of life and food habits were very simple. Though extremely hard working, they rarely took ill, and when they did, the treatment they undertook was also very simple. They relied primarily on herbal remedies sourced from plants, roots, and herbs for the treatment of illness, wounds, injuries, and the like. Common ailments were treated using different medicinal plants and substances available in their kitchen garden, fields, or forest. Additionally, the Naga healing system also incorporated a substantial use of rituals and sacrifices as 'interventions' for unexplained ailments. Hence, the indigenous healing process of the Naga people can be broadly categorized into two forms, i.e., the supernatural form and the material form of healing. Detailed discussion of such is presented in the following sections:

3.1. *The supernatural form of healing*

The supernatural form of healing process is based upon mysticism or claimed revelations, rather than the empirical evidence which is the bases of scientific medicine. It is based upon the hypothesis that physical symptoms of illness are a manifestation of disturbances in some nonphysical component of the person. This form of healing process involves mediating between spirits and human, and worshipping in the form of sacrifices and rituals. The Authors found that the antidotes for various illnesses among the Nagas were connected to magico-religious beliefs and propitiations of the supernatural beings and spirits. In the olden days, the only 'doctors' were these traditional healers who diagnosed the causes as well as treated the sickness too. As the go-between of the spirits and sick persons, upon examining the patient, the traditional healer instructs the patient that the spirit seeks a sacrificial animal which may be either a pig or hen. The same is procured by the patient and accordingly sacrificed by the healer, completely in the belief that the sick person would be cured. Alternatively, when a person was thought to have been stricken by spirits resulting in illness, they will consult their clan chief who then proceeds to perform a rite by killing a hen and extracting its innards. The chief will then seek for signs as to how and why he became sick. The duration to get healed was also interpreted by reading the intestines of the sacrificial hen. The patient then offers sacrifice, either a dog or a cock, as per the 'demand' of the spirits and return home. These ritualistic sacrifices were accompanied by chants entreating the spirits '*to take the animal as a substitute for the sick person.*'

Being agriculturists, the Naga social life revolves around agriculture and its seasons. While going to the field, a woman always walked ahead, and the man walked behind her, carrying a *Dao*¹ in the waist belt and a spear on the right shoulder. They believed that such an act would ward off the evil spirit for it was believed that the evil spirit would see the spear as piercing the man's throat and be amazed at the bravery of the humans. Thus, it is said that in the olden days every girl wanted to marry only those men who were brave and knew the art of spearing and use of *Daos*, which supposedly made them feel protected from enemies and evil spirits (for sicknesses).

An important element associated with the supernatural form of traditional healing system was the observance of *genna*. *Genna*, which has its roots in the Angami-Naga word *kenna*, meaning 'prohibition' possesses socially and religiously dangerous attributions and is believed to produce misfortune if it is not observed strictly. Thus, the Nagas strictly observed *genna* to avoid consequences upon them. During a *genna* period, much of what is

¹ A Naga Machete

part of everyday routine life comes to a standstill- it is forbidden to travel, to engage in sexual relations or to eat certain types of food. A *genna* period can last several days, and, depending on the occasion, has to be observed either by the whole family or only by certain individuals. At times of sicknesses or illness when certain rituals were necessitated, the Naga people observed *genna* or purity. In the olden days if a person was sick, then the person would abstained from taking meat as well. The healer or diviner instead took a sacrificial animal which may be either a hen, pig or a dog to the forest and offered sacrifices whilst the sick person together with his/her family members observed *genna* at that time.

The above-mentioned rituals and practices were clearly devoid of any scientific rationalization but the blind faith and belief reposed by the people upon the traditional healers and medicine men can only be attributed to the indigenous belief system of the Naga people which is characterized by belief in spirits. In light of the above-mentioned practices, some indigenous supernatural forms of healing process practiced by the Nagas are briefly discussed as under:

i. Casting away of evil wind

The following forms of treatment were indigenously practiced among the different Naga tribes in order to cast away evil or of evil wind:

- (a) The leaves of Holy basil is crushed and applied on the stomach of the victim, or it is crushed, steeped, filtered in the water and the water consumed.
- (b) To be protected from the 'eyes of evil spirit' or to prevent the spirit from following them, the leaves of *Artemisia* sp., locally known as *Thopi nü* in Chakhesang-khezha dialect are plucked and worn on the ears.
- (c) If one put the leaves of a plant known as *Likokmeyu* in Ao Naga dialect on the ears, it is believed to keep a person safe from the evil's eye. It can be taken raw for stomach ache and evil possession.
- (d) Fresh Broom stick plant, known as *Leptsu* in Ao Naga dialect was used to shoo off evil spirit by whipping with it on the possessed person.
- (e) A small amount of nutgall powder wrapped in a piece of cloth and tied on the necklace of small baby, especially when the parents take them to the field, was believed to ward off the evil eye or any form of sickness.
- (f) Bamboo tubes filled with water was also placed near the door in order to stop evil spirit entering the house.
- (g) A plant known as *Changjangwa* among the Ao Naga was regarded as a Holy plant. This plant was often used for massaging and also to cast away evil spirit. The Naga people placed it in the house in order to cast away evil spirit or whenever a family member was sick. At such times, the sick person was cared for at home with all the doors and windows closed. All the normal chores were hauled up, and only in case of unavoidable situation, the mother goes to the field to do the task until the sick person recover. However, it may be noted that this particular plant was used only when the husband and wife in the family were observing *genna*. The traditional healers also used the plant in casting away the evil spirit from the patient. Legend has it that even the spirit or God told *Etiben*² When she was wearing *Changjangwa* on her ears like so, "How can I touch you when you are wearing my flower...you never fall sick".

ii. As *genna* plant

The plant *Zanthoxylum nitidum* known locally as *Changpet* in Ao Naga dialect is considered as a *genna* plant. When people were observing *genna*, they hung up that particular plant in the house so that visitors would know even from outside that the inmates are observing *genna*. Consequently, people refrained from visiting that particular house.

3.2. The material form of healing

² The protagonist in the famous Ao Naga's love folklore, 'Etiben and Jinaba', akin to the legendary Shakespearean love story of Romeo and Juliet. A tale of love affair between two lovers under extreme pressure and opposition from family has a tragic ending.

The material form of healing process, on the other hand, involved the use of certain minerals and natural products like plants, animal derivatives, etc. It was found that sicknesses among the Nagas were also treated with herbal remedies like holy basil, nutgall, ginger, garlic, etc. These herbs and medicinal plants were collected during summer, preserved and taken for various ailments. In addition to plant remedies, animal-based derivatives were also used by the traditional healers. For instance, snake soup for body ache, usage of the blood of the pig and deer for various diseases, etc., are known facts. Some indigenous material form of healing practiced by the Naga people are briefly discussed as under:

i. Treatment for headache

For treating headache, the following traditional methods were applied:

- (a) Holy basil or *Ocimum basilicum*, which is known as *Nangpera* in Ao Naga dialect or *Ao* in Chang Naga dialect is boiled, and the water drunk to relieve headache. Alternatively, the patient is advised to wash the head with cold water.
- (b) Mustard leaves are warmed in the fire and pasted or placed on the forehead and on the back of the neck.
- (c) Applying the paste of garlic, holy basil and mustard leaves known as *Yukushik* in Chang Naga dialect on the forehead is said to offer quick relief.
- (d) Pulling little tufts of hair one after another is supposed to be another remedy for headache.

ii. Treatment for stomach ache

The following indigenous methods were practiced by the Nagas for treating stomach ache:

- (a) Among the Chang Nagas, for stomach ache, warm ash along with some charcoal is dropped into a pot of water, and after filtering, the water is consumed. Otherwise, the boiled leaves of *Clerodendrum colebrookianum*, a wild vegetable known locally as *Orüma* in Ao Naga dialect or *Waram* in Chang Naga dialect is also used for the above ailment.
- (b) Black tea as well as boiled guava leaves is prescribed as a tonic for stomach traditionally. Also, the leaves of *Curanga aroma*, locally known as *Longriwa* in Ao Naga dialect is eaten raw for the same purpose.
- (c) For flatulence, the fruit of red sorrel or Rosselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa* Linn.) known locally as *Entsürep* in Ao Naga dialect is either eaten raw, or its water drunk after boiling or steeping for some time.
- (d) Holy basil and nutgall (*Rhus semialata*), which is commonly known as *Tangma/ Tangmo* among the Ao Nagas or *Ao* among the Chang Nagas or *Tangba* among Yimchuger Nagas are also prescribed to relieve stomach pain.

iii. Treatment for toothache

The following traditional treatment for toothache among the different Naga tribes was commonly practiced:

- (a) For toothache, a round ball worm called Roly Poly, which is known as *Ngeket* in Chang Naga dialect was crushed, and its sticky juice applied immediately to the tooth.
- (b) The roots of peach tree, known as *Shonpi* in Chang dialect, are also taken out and crushed. Then, its paste was applied to the cavities to stop the pain.
- (c) The flower of *Pellitory* (*Spilanthes acmella* Linn) which is commonly referred to as Akarkara in India or *Hokisüngcha* in Ao Naga dialect is applied on the cavity afflicted tooth to reduce the pain.
- (d) To relieve toothache, the fruits of *Solanum khasianum*, known as *Akho Longkok* in Ao Naga dialect or *Thechehushe* in Chakhesang Naga dialect was smoked and crushed into powder form, which was thereafter, smoked in the form of a cigarette.

iv. Treatment for burns

The following indigenous methods for treating burns were commonly practiced among the Naga tribes:

- (a) The lard of chicken and snake were preserved and applied as ointment on the burns.
- (b) The scale of pangolin, which is known as *Külep* in Ao-Mongsen dialect or *Tüpho* in Chakhesang-Chokri dialect, is also burned and applied on the burned area.

- (c) The shell of a snail, known as *Lepo* in Chakhesang-Kheza dialect is burned, and the ashes are applied on the affected part.

v. Treatment for clotting of blood

The leaves of *Datura suaveolens* or Datura, which is locally known as *Naagben* in Ao Naga dialect, or *Thurhüba* or *Mukrenhe* in Chakhesang Naga dialect are warmed in the fire and pasted on the affected area. As a result, the leaves make the impure blood to gather in a particular place. After that, the skin is pricked with a bamboo splinter whereby the impure blood can be removed.

vi. Treatment to stop bleeding from cuts and wounds

The following traditional treatment was commonly practiced among the different Naga tribes:

- (a) Ash is applied on the wound.
- (b) The yolk of an egg is used for cut wound in order to prevent it from becoming septic or for healing the cut skin.
- (c) The leaves of a plant called *Tsümar Za* in Ao-Mongsen dialect are also crushed and applied on the wound.
- (d) Honey is also applied for cuts or wounds.
- (e) The leaves of a plant called *Nok Mozü* in Ao Naga dialect are crushed and applied on the wound.
- (f) To stop bleeding from cuts and wounds, the leaves of the following plants are also used by crushing and pasting it on the wound:
 - *Eupatorium adenophorum*, commonly known as Crofton Weed or Sticky Snakeroot.
 - The plant *Mikania micrantha* H. B. K, known as *Japanza* in Ao Naga dialect or *Japan Nya* in Chakhesang-Chokri or *Japan Prü* in Chakhesang-khezha dialect.
 - A plant known as *Pentongza* in Ao-Mongsen dialect or *Vülanha* in Chakhesang-khezha dialect.
 - Beggars ticks (*Bidens pilosa* L.), which is commonly known as *Kome Netsü* in Chakhesang-Khezha dialect or as *Khomanabiza* in Ao-Mongsen dialect; and
 - Alder (*Alnus nepalensis*), known as *Ongpangtentong* among the Ao Naga or *Lepulü* among the Chakhesang Naga.
 - The root of Curculigo (*Curculigo crassifolia* (Bak.)), which is known as *Kor* in Ao Naga dialect is crushed and applied its paste on the wound to stop bleeding.

vii. Traditional Bandage

The bark of Wild Rhea (*Debregeasia longifolia*), which is known as *Nachitong* among the Ao Naga or *Mülisuh* among the Chakhesang Naga were traditionally used as bandage to dress wounds.

viii. Treatment for quick healing of wounds

For quick healing of wounds, frog meat and snails are consumed as it is believed to hasten the healing of wounds. Even today, patients are commonly served these dishes after medical surgeries for rapid recuperation.

ix. Treatment for broken skull

Broken skull is treated by applying the yolk of the egg.

x. Treatment for dysentery and typhoid

The following methods are generally prescribed for the treatment of dysentery and typhoid:

- (a) Chew guava leaves, or the outer cover of pomegranate fruit or the bark of the tree called *Pachet* tree in Ao Naga dialect.

- (b) For the treatment of dysentery, the intestines of porcupine are dried, boiled, and a soup made out of it and consumed.
- (c) Holy basil and nutgall are boiled together, and the water is consumed.
- (d) The slippery substance which is found inside the trunk of Agarwood (*Aquilaria malaccensis* D. Don), which is locally called as *Süngya* in Ao Naga dialect is boiled, and the juice is taken to cure dysentery.
- (e) Guava shoots and leaves are boiled, and the juice is taken to cure dysentery.
- (f) The leaves of *Euphorbia hirta* or Pill-bearing Spurge are also boiled, and the juice is taken to cure diarrhea.
- (g) Passion fruit leaves are crushed and the juice taken as tonic.
- (h) Unripe banana, eaten after roasting in fire, is said to be good for dysentery.
- (i) For dysentery and typhoid, a mixture of a small quantity of opium with warm water is also prescribed.
- (j) A small amount of mud from anthills or some flies, known locally as *Jongko Li* in Ao Naga dialect is also taken for dysentery and stomach pain.

xi. Treatment for sore throat

Water of boiled holy basil, which is known as *Nangpera* in Ao Naga dialect or *Yanhing* in kongyak Naga dialect is drunk as a tonic for sore throat.

xii. Treatment for intestinal problem

For the treatment of intestinal issues, the gallbladders of bear and porcupine, known as *Throgtu* in Sangtam Naga dialect or *Saan* in Chang Naga dialect or *Khaotsuo* in Khiamungan Naga dialect are prescribed.

xiii. Treatment for general weaknesses and recuperation from various sicknesses

The following methods of treatment were commonly prescribed:

- (a) Soups derived from meat of local pig, which is known as *Okmei* in Chang Naga dialect, cock known as *Aupang* in Chang Naga dialect, hen known as *Auny* in Chang Naga dialect were served at times of accidents.
- (b) Ash gourd is boiled, and its soup served to woman after delivery based on the belief that helps to produce more milk and recuperate from childbirth.
- (c) Soup made from the seeds of Perilla (*Perilla frutescens* Linn.), locally known as *Avüing* in Ao Naga dialect or *Nam* in Chang Naga dialect is often given to women right after delivery. The same is also given to injured people, or people suffering from general weakness.

xiv. Treatment for backache and body pain

The following methods were indigenously practiced for the treatment of backache and body pain:

- (a) The meat and soup of snake, which is known as *Lenü* or *Tinyhe* in Chakhesang Naga dialect, are taken to relieve the pain.
- (b) Among the Chang Nagas, if a person suffers from backache for a long period of time, he/she is advised to go near to a tree, which should be big and huge. Then, he/she should pretend to carry the tree on his/her back by putting a traditional head strap on the tree, which is locally named as *Nyampük* in Chang dialect. Later, with all his/her might, the victim should try, twice, to walk away carrying the tree on his/her back. Lastly in vain, at the third try, he/she should run back home, leaving the tree behind saying, "I cannot carry the load, so you just take it." As a result, they believed that the pain would subside.

xiv. Treatment for joint pain

The following methods of treatment were usually practiced to get relief from joint pain:

- (a) The leaves of castor oil plant (*Ricinus communis* Linn.), which is locally known as *Penpangtong/Iritong* in Ao Naga dialect are warmed a bit on the fire or wrap some warm ash by it and apply it gently on the pain portion to get relief.
- (b) The fats of snake and the bone marrow of an animal called *Thülü* in Chakhesang-Chokri dialect are also used for massaging joint dislocation.

xv. Treatment for menstrual cramps

For treatment of menstrual pain, a piece of cloth is soaked in warm water, squeezed and placed in the lower abdomen for smooth flow of menstruation and get relief from the menstrual cramps.

xvi. Treatment for any poisonous insect bite like snake, spider, etc.

The following treatment was commonly practiced indigenously among the Nagas:

- (a) For any poisonous insect bite like snake, spider, etc., ginger leaves were crushed and applied on the wound. Or, thatch grass, which is known as *Aidong* in Ao Naga dialect or *Lang* in Chang Naga dialect is tied on the bitten part in order to stop the poison from spreading throughout the body.
- (b) The bitten part is soaked in water, or the juice of banana stem was applied in order to stop the poison from spreading.
- (c) Snakebite is also treated by sucking the poison out of the punctures after binding the bitten part tightly, both above and below the wound. This is followed by feeding the patient with dog meat or the juice of a crushed earthworm called *Thophü* (Chakhesang-Khezha Naga dialect) which is found in banana tree.

xvii. For birth control

In the olden days, the Chang Nagas believed that if a woman goes quickly to the bottle brush tree (*Callistemon*), which is known as *Buhoung Sovomai* in Chang Naga dialect and hug it tightly, then she would turn infertile. Chapped heels are also believed to heal by rubbing on the bark of the same tree.

xviii. Treatment for eye injury and inflammation

- (a) Mother's milk is put inside the eyes, and this is considered the best treatment for any eye injury or disease.
- (b) The seed of holy basil is also put inside the eyes. The tiny seed is thought to gather the particles that cause inflammation, which will eventually be dislodged from the eyes. The seeds will just melt away inside the eyes.

xix. Treatment for skin diseases like ringworm infection

For the treatment of skin diseases, holy basil leaves are crushed and pasted on the affected portion.

xx. Treatment for ear pain

The dew from the stem of spiral ginger (*Costus speciosus*), which is known as *Alar naro* in Ao Naga dialect or *Pfünotshe* in Chakhesang-Chokri dialect is put inside the ear.

xxi. Treatment for stucked fish bone

To flush down fish bone stuck inside the throat, rhododendron leaves and flowers are eaten.

xxii. Food poisoning, allergy, and vomiting

Nutgall is taken for food poisoning, allergy, and to stop vomiting.

xxiii. Dog bite

The whiskers of the dog that has bitten a man are pulled out and burned. The burned ash is then applied to the wound.

xxiv. Ant bite

For ant bite, crushed garlic is pasted on the affected area.

xxv. Treatment for cough and cold

The following traditional treatment for cough and cold was commonly practiced among the different tribes of Nagaland:

- (a) For cough, massage the foot with the juice of ginger, which is known as *Si* in Chang Naga dialect.
- (b) Nutgall with water is taken as tonic for cough and cold.
- (c) Hatched egg shells are burnt, covered with a shawl or blanket and the smoke inhaled.
- (d) Dog's gallbladder is also consumed as a remedy for cough.
- (e) The legs of jungle fowl, which is known as *Opela* in Ao or as *Choli* in Chakhesang-Chokri dialect are preserved and used in case of cough by preparing soup.
- (f) For monkey cough, the meat of squirrel, locally known as *Küle* in Chakhesang-Chokri and wild rat, called *Thüzü* in Chakhesang-Chokri are taken. Even its intestine and internal organs can be consumed after drying.
- (g) For cough, crushed garlic in mustard oil is warmed and massaged on the chest of the patient.

xxvi. Treatment for fever

The following indigenous methods of treating fever were commonly practiced:

- (a) Soup made of poison berry (*Solanum torvum*), known as *Chekhushe* in Chakhesang-Chokri dialect is taken by crushing the berry and boiling it.
- (b) The root of *Rubus ellipticus*, commonly known as *Ranushe* or *Ramuhushe* in Chakhesang Naga dialect is clean and boiled. Then, the soup is served to the patient for fever.
- (c) For fever, squirrel, and wild rat's meat and soup is also taken.
- (d) For irregular fever, the gall bladder and pancreas of bear, locally known as *Thuga* in Chakhesang-Chokri dialect are also prescribed.
- (e) To get relief from fever, cucumber leaves are washed, crushed with the palm and the juice squeezed out and consumed.
- (f) The leaves of Nepal prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum oxyphyllum*), locally called as *Müyitishe* or *Metishe* in Chakhesang Naga dialect or as *Manguwa* or *Mongmong* in Ao Naga dialect is also taken after boiling.

xxvii. To regain consciousness

Orange or lemons leaves are crushed and inhaled for problems like shivering or blackout cases. In such a condition, the victim is made to inhale it, and after that, the facial muscles are pulled to make the person to regain consciousness.

xxviii. Treatment for measles

The following methods are generally prescribed for measles:

- (a) Crabs and anything that are found in the water, are taken to let the measles erupt, which is believed to aid faster recovery from the disease.
- (b) For measles in kids, frog meat and soup are considered the best treatment.

xxix. Treatment for Malaria

The following indigenous methods of treating malaria were practiced:

- (a) The dung of the cock is eaten when it is still fresh as it is sour.
- (b) Another treatment for malaria was to splash the patient with cold water wrapped in yam leaves, as he/she returns from the toilet. The shock from this treatment is believed to cure the person of malaria.
- (c) The leaves of a plant called *Ngounam* in Chang Naga dialect and a tree called *Simbo* in Chang Naga dialect is crushed, and a tonic from its leave is taken.

Over and above the above narrated traditional remedies for various ailments, the Naga people believed that black cats could cure any kind of disease.

4. Indigenous Method of Child Birth and Care

In the olden days, pre- natal medical care was not available to pregnant women, unlike the present. It was common for pregnant Naga women to munch on Shale, a kind of soft stone called *Longpen Long* in Ao to satisfy their craving. An uncanny similarity in this habit exists in regions near Hyderabad and various parts of Kenya where pregnant women are known to consume copious portions of soft limestone in order to satisfy and subdue midnight cravings and bouts of morning sickness. The soft stones are locally known as *Odowa* in Kenya and *Khadi* in Hyderabad (Henry, 2015). No concession in daily chores was expected by Naga women during pregnancy, and they continued to engage in the daily routine of livelihood sustenance including a collection of firewood, fetching water, as well as working in the field. Perhaps due to all the physical activities undertaken by the pregnant women, childbirth was said to be relatively easy and simple. In fact, a pregnant woman was encouraged to keep up with daily chores based on the belief that physical activity would warm her blood, leading to an easier delivery. As far as delivery is a concern, women gave birth wherever they happen to be working. It is said that in the olden days babies were delivered on the way to the field, or sometimes, even in the field itself, obviously without any medical assistance. In case delivery takes place in the jungle or field, they placed some leaves on the ground for the mother to lie down. Banana leaves and Major Jenkins palms (*Livistonia jenkinsiana*) were generally used for this purpose.

Traditionally, during child birth, people removed all the ornaments from the expectant mother due to the belief that those ornaments would block the passage of the child. Thereafter, the midwife anoints the mother and would encourage her to be strong until the delivery. It is said that there were some midwives who were not compatible with the pregnant woman, which made the delivery even difficult. So in subsequent delivery of the same mother, such midwives, even if they wanted to come and help, were not called on for assistance. During child birth, diluted ash in cold water was given to the mother ostensibly in order to let the placenta be removed faster. Also, warm water, soft cooked rice, and chicken were popularly served to the mother during child birth. After delivery, a sharp bamboo sliver was used to cut the umbilical cord, which was then tied by a cotton thread. Traditionally, the father was assigned to cut the umbilical cord and wash the placenta. Thereafter, it was wrapped in banana leaves and either placed or buried in a bamboo platform to protect from animals. It was considered a bad omen if animals ate the placenta. Thus, extra care was taken in its disposal. The newborn child was then given bath with warm water and thereafter red thread was tied on the baby's belly saying "*you are mine from now.*" As in the olden days, even now, it was found that the villagers of Shangsha under Mon district use bamboo to cut umbilical cord which was said to prevent it from becoming septic.

Certain rituals and observances followed the delivery of the baby. If the baby is a girl, then for five days, and for six days if it is a boy, the members of the household should not engage in any work as a form of respect; nobody within the house should speak loudly; the family members should not even cut anything with *Dao* near the place where the mother and the new born baby were lying. Above all, they should observe strict *genna* for these five or six days by not letting any guest enter the house. During these five or six days as the case maybe, they should not even go to the field or for hunting or do any house hold chores like pounding rice which produce loud sounds. Later, when the mother go the field leaving behind her new baby at home while returning back, she put a particular leave, known as *Changjangwa* in Ao Naga dialect on her ear in order to ward off evil spirit from her. This act was ostensibly to prevent any evil spirit from following her home.

Thus, delivery and childcare in olden days were very simple, yet, full of rituals. Women never undertook any pre-natal tests or examination, nor any specific medications during pregnancy. In spite of lack of access to any modern medical facilities, still complications of child birth were very rare. The only 'doctors' for them were the traditional midwives, who assisted them in times of child birth. But even then, should they give birth in the field or on the way, they could manage by themselves.

5. Change and continuity

As the preceding sections indicate, prior to the advent of the Christianity the Nagas accorded the cause of most ailments to be the handiwork of malevolent spirits. In the absence of modern medical facilities, for any illness, wounds or injuries they had no alternative to the traditional healing system which was more often than not associated with magico-religious beliefs and propitiations of the supernatural beings and spirits. However, Christianity and modern education changed their worldview. With the advent and widespread acceptance of Christianity in the Naga society, worship of the Supreme Being, stone, lakes, big trees and spirits were changed to the worship of one God Almighty- Jehovah (Ao, 2004). The fear of the spirits and the burden of sacrificial rite were replaced by simple prayer (Henshet, 2000). The observance of *genna* and sacrifices faded away to be replaced by a new rational outlook.

Today, the indigenous health care practices, as well as the health-seeking behaviour of Naga people, have undergone a far change. People presently preferred to seek allopathic treatment for their ailments as long as they could afford it with the rationalization that the medical doctors are professionally trained, unlike the traditional healers. Moreover, it is popularly held that modern allopathic medication provided faster relief and since it is based on extensive research and clinical trials, it appears to be a more reliable and safer option than the traditional healing system for the people. However, in spite of the changes in the health-seeking behaviour of the people, there is strong evidence of the prevalence of medical plurality and amalgamation of modern and traditional health care system in Naga society. Traditional use of herbs and plants still remains the first line of treatment for minor ailments. Following which most people tend to seek allopathic doctors when it comes to common illness caused by known pathogens. However, for unexplained illnesses, diagnosis of which remains problematic even through the intervention of medical doctors, supernatural elements are believed to be at play. The response to such ailments sees people still seeking traditional healers. However, unlike the pre-Christian era which saw the extensive use of sacrificial rituals, today's traditional healers for supernatural cases comes in the form of faith healers or prayer warriors who claim to heal patients with the power of prayer and people widely throng to them for unexplained sicknesses. Hence, it is clear that the choice of treatment is often related to the perceived cause of illness. Most Nagas tend to seek allopathic doctors when it comes to common illness caused by the natural world. However, for illnesses attributed to supernatural elements, they sought the intervention of traditional healers. Thus, this practice of health-seeking behaviour among the Nagas conforms to Allan Young's (1976) concepts of 'assimilation' and 'particularization' in explaining how they look upon the modern medicine, which is an alien system for them.

With the advancement of medical science and increase in knowledge, the health care practices of the traditional healers in Naga society too have undergone changes consequent to the change in the belief system. It is seen that many healers have altered their technique of treatment as well as their medicinal products. The present study found that the medicines and therapy used by the indigenous healers today are not purely traditional in nature, but it is blended with modern scientific methods. Consequently, some traditional healers were found using a combination of allopathic medicines with their own herbal medicine in their line of treatment, while others have started using plasters, bandage, various allopathic ointment, etc., along with their traditional technique of treatment. Besides, a substantial number of healers at 13.70 percent in the study were also found prescribing allopathic medicines to the patients. This practice may be viewed with concern for two reasons: firstly, the traditional healers do not have the scientific knowledge of the chemical compositions of the medicines they are prescribing; secondly, it reflects a sense of lack of efficacy or confidence of those traditional healers in their own products. This does not augur well for the future continuity of the age-old indigenous healing system of the Naga people which is faced with the onslaught of the modern medical system and appears to be teetering.

Such development hence calls for pressing rational, proactive measures which would stem the disintegration of valuable indigenous knowledge of a people. There is a need to look at the science and technology of indigenous healing practices and try to develop it instead of replacing it in the name of scientific development and modernization. The importance of research in the field of traditionally used medicinal plants and minerals are felt more than ever. Scientific study and identification of active plant compounds and their efficacy of use in traditional healing system can lead to the discovery of new therapeutic benefits and the production of nature-based products in the future. To achieve this, extensive research is fundamentally important to control the quality

of raw drugs and formulation to justify their use in the modern medical system, subsequently, animal studies and clinical trials are required to use the benefits of these plants. Ultimately urgent proper documentation of indigenous knowledge relating to health care practices and medicines used by the traditional health practitioners in Nagaland is urgently necessary as most of the knowledge is in an oral form which can be forgotten or lost if not recorded or documented. It should be realized that the loss of these rich and diverse eco-system based knowledge and skills will be corrosion to the traditional value system and its cultural history.

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