

## Traditional Health Care in Birhor Tribes of Chhattisgarh

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### Abstract

Chhattisgarh, the 26th State of India is situated between 17 to 23.7 degrees north latitude and 8.40 to 83.38 east longitude. Chhattisgarh abounds in hilly regions and plains. The culture of the people of Chhattisgarh is linked to the forests and the people share an intense emotional bond with the 'jungle'. This is especially true of forest based and tribal communities. Major festivals, religious practices, social events, traditional customs of child birth, totems and the systems of indigenous medicine and nutrition are based on forest produce. Birhor means peoples of jungles. The word 'Bir' means Jungle and 'Hos' mean's men. so we can call them as "People of Jungle". The Birhor is one of the primitive Tribal Groups of the State of Chhattisgarh. They are found in the districts of Jashpur, Raigarh, Surguja, Bilaspur and Korba in present Chhattisgarh State. Birhor is one of the five identified primitive tribes(Hill Korwa, Birhor, Baiga, Kamar and Abujhmaria) of C.G. They speak Mundari language of Austro – Asiatic family. Their population is 1,145 and literacy rate is 1.60% .The Bihors do not practice any form of agriculture and are entirely dependent upon the collection of forest products for their living. Occasionally they also do a little bit of hunting with small basket traps. The paper reports the results of an ethnomedicinal study conducted in Chhattisgarh. The study has been carried out in Jashpur, Raigarh, and Korba districts. Birhor tribes are used some traditional medicine for their health care. Traditional uses are described for 27 species, like - *Acorus calamus*, *Adhatoda vasica*, *Cassia Fistula*, *Andrographis paniculata*, *Anogissus latifolia* , *Balanites aegyptiaca* , *Alocasia indica* , *Indigofera cassioides* *Gymnema sylvestre*, *Holarrhena antidysenterica*, *Euphorbia hirta* etc.in various ailments.

**KEYWORDS:-** Chhattisgarh, Traditional healthcare, Birhor, Primitive tribe

### Introduction

Chhattisgarh, the 26th State of India is situated between 17 to 23.7 degrees north latitude and 8.40 to 83.38 east longitude. Chhattisgarh abounds in hilly regions and plains. It receives an annual average rainfall of 60 inches. Rice is the principal crop of the State. The scheduled tribes, with a population of over fifty seven lakh, constitute 32.5 per cent of the State's population as per the 1991 census. Almost 98.1 per cent of this population lives in the rural areas and only 1.9 per cent in urban Chhattisgarh. Among the larger States in India, Chhattisgarh has the highest percentage of population of people from the scheduled tribes. Chhattisgarh is rich in forest resources. About 44 per cent of the total area of the State is under forest cover. Chhattisgarh is famous in the entire country for its *sal* forests.

A Birhor must abstain from killing, destroying, maiming, hunting, injuring, eating or otherwise using the animal, plant or other object that form his clan totem, or anything,

made out of or obtained from it. From the forests they collect edible roots, fruit, honey and barks of *Bauhinia* for the manufacture of rope baskets. The Birhors are noted for their love of monkey's flesh and skill in trapping these animals. They procure a staple food rice from the neighbouring agriculturists in exchange of forest products. They are found in the districts of Jashpur, Raigarh, Surguja, Bilaspur and Korba in present Chhattisgarh State. Many of the anthropologists believe that birhors are basically belonging to the "Proto Australide" group. In the period of the fifth planning commission five most backward tribes were identified as the Primitive tribe groups in the undivided Madhya Pradesh. In the Seventh five year planning commission period one another most backward tribe namely "Birhor" was also listed in the Primitive tribe groups. After formation of Chhattisgarh as a 26th state of India in the year of 2000; 1st November; the Birhors were also listed among the five Primitive tribe groups of Chhattisgarh.

Birhor is one of the five identified primitive tribes (Hill Korwa, Birhor, Baiga, Kamar and Abujhmaria) of C.G. Birhors are inhabited in Raigarh and Jashpur districts. They speak Mundari language of Austro – Asiatic family. Their population is 1,145 and literacy rate is 1.60% (Table :-1)

**Table 1 :- Distribution of Birhor tribes in Chhattisgarh**

District	Block	No.of Village	No.of Family	Population 2005
Raigarh	1. Dharamjaigarh 2. Gharghora 3. Tamnar 4. Lailunga	21	19	Male - 357 Female – 384 <hr/> Total - 744
Jashpur	1. Kunkuri 2. Duldula 3. Kansabel 4. Bagicha 5. Pharsabahar 6. Pathalgaon	11	110	Male – 216 Female -185 <hr/> Total - 401
Total	10	32	305	Male - 573 Female – 572 <hr/> Total – 1,145

(Source: Office of the Hill-Korwa and Birhor development agency, Jashpur. 2005)

The Birhors do not practice any form of agriculture and are entirely dependent upon the collection of forest products for their living. Occasionally they also do a little bit of hunting with small basket traps. A Birhor must abstain from killing, destroying, maiming, hunting, injuring, eating or otherwise using the animal, plant or other object that form his clan totem, or anything, made out of or obtained from it. From the forests they collect edible roots, fruit, honey, barks of *Bauhinia* for the manufacture of rope baskets and wild plants used for their health care on the basis of their ancestors knowledge or also use their own trial and error method. The Birhors are noted for their love of monkey's flesh and skill in trapping these animals. They procure staple food rice from the neighbouring agriculturists in exchange of forest products.

Chhattisgarh has one-third tribal population and their traditional health care knowledge is vast and varied. As there is a paucity of systematic scientific research, in this direction therefore, to fill this gap the present study has been conducted on Birhor tribe of C.G. The objectives of the present paper are to report the traditional health care knowledge of Birhor tribal group of C.G. with special reference to some common ailments and diseases (Table- 2). It also examines the perception of disease among Birhor

**Observation Table 2:- Traditional plants used in different ailments by Birhor tribes**

S.No.	Botanical name	Local name	Family	Part Used	Disease and Mode of administration
1.	<i>Acorus calamus</i> Linn.	<i>Bach</i>	Araceae	rhizome	<b>Vomiting &amp; dysentery</b> - Crushed roots (Rhizome) are taken one teaspoonful with a cup of water once a day for 2 days to stop vomiting & dysentery.
2.	<i>Andrographis paniculata</i> Nees.	<i>Bhui neem</i>	Acanthaceae	leaf	<b>Intermittent fever</b> - Two hundred and fifty gram of leaves boiled with water and taken one glassful, twice a day for 3 days.
3.	<i>Balanites aegyptiaca</i> L.	<i>Banchadi</i>	Balanitaceae	Root	<b>Typhoid</b> - Hundred grams roots crushed with a cup of water and is mixed with one teaspoonful sugar and taken twice a day for three week.
4.	<i>Cassia Fistula</i> Linn.	<i>Amaltas</i>	Caesalpiniaaceae	Stem bark	<b>Snake bite</b> - Paste of stem bark applied on bitten place and one spoon full paste taken with a cup of water, once a day for 2 days.
5.	<i>Cissampelos pareira</i> Linn.	Parhi	Menispermaceae	Root	<b>Sinus</b> - Root paste is applied on the affected part as a remedy for sinus, twice a day for 2 week. <b>Paralysis</b> - Crushed root is boiled with <i>sarson</i> oil and massage on affected part, twice a day for one month.
6.	<i>Curcuma amada</i> Roxb.	<i>Ami haldi</i>	Zingiberaceae	rhizome	<b>Mouth ulcer</b> - Fresh rhizome paste is applied on affected part, once a day before bed time for one week.
7.	<i>Diospyros peregrina</i> Gaertn. “	Makad tendu	Ebenaceae	Stem bark	<b>Fever</b> - Decoction of stem bark is taken one cupful, twice a day for two days to cure fever.
8.	<i>Elephantopus scaber</i> L.	Minjur chundi	Asteraceae	Root	<b>Toothache</b> - Fresh crushed root is used as toothpaste, twice a day for one week to relieve pain. <b>Wounds</b> - Root paste is applied on affected part, twice a day for one

					week to heal wounds. <b>To ease delivery</b> - Decoction of root is given one glassful to pregnant woman during labour pain to ease delivery.
9.	<i>Euphorbia hirta</i> L.	<i>Doodhi</i>	Euphorbiaceae	whole plant	<b>Adequate milk Secretion</b> – Decoction of whole plant is given on cupful twice daily for mother for 4 to 5 days.
10.	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.	<i>Gular</i>	Moraceae	fruits	<b>Asthma</b> - Decoction of young fruits are taken one glassful mixed with one spoonful of <i>mishri</i> , twice a day for one month. <b>Burns</b> - Paste of young fruits is applied on the affected part for 3 days.
11	<i>Gloriosa superba</i> L.	Jhagda phool	Liliaceae	Root	<b>Epilepsy</b> - Ten grams of root boiled with one glass of milk and is taken once a day at morning for one month to cure Epilepsy. <b>Male sterility</b> - One glassful of roots decoction mixed with <i>Mishri</i> and is taken once a day before bedtime for one month. <b>Jaundice</b> - Garland of fresh tuber pieces put around the neck of patient for 10-15 days.
12.	<i>Gymnema sylvestre</i> R. Br.	<i>Gurmar</i>	Asclepiadaceae	leaf	<b>Diabetes</b> - Leaves powder is taken, one teaspoonful with a cup of water twice a day for one month to cure diabetes.
13.	<i>Holarrhena antidysenterica</i> Wall. ex.DC.	Korya	Apocynaceae	Root, stem bark, Leaf	<b>Dysentery</b> - A glassful of root decoction is taken twice a day for 2-3 days to cure dysentery. <b>Malarial fever</b> - The stem bark decoction is given one glassful orally in the morning for 7 days in the treatment of malarial fever. <b>Hair growth</b> - Leaf juice is applied on hair before hair wash once a week for dandruff and killing lice.
14.	<i>Indigofera cassioides</i> Rottler Ex DC.	<i>Khilbiri</i>	Fabaceae	Leaf	<b>Body pain</b> - Leaves paste (20 gram) is mixed with oil of <i>Derris indica</i> and massaged twice a day for one week to relieve pain.
15.	<i>Madhuca indica</i> Gmel.	Mahua	Sapotaceae	Seed, stem bark, Oil	<b>Hair falling</b> - Seeds are good source of oil. Oil of the seeds is massaged on head once a week for one month to prevent hair falling.

					<p><b>Jaundice</b> - Decoction of stem bark is used for bath after applying the ash of <i>Achyranthes aspera</i> on body once a day for 3 days.</p> <p><b>Skin disease</b> - Warm oil applied on affected part thrice a day for one week to cure any type of skin disease.</p>
16.	<i>Nyctanthes arbor-tristis</i> Linn.	Harsinghar	Nyctanthaceae	Leaf	<p><b>Sciatica</b> - A decoction of the leaves prepared over a gentle fire is a specific remedy for obstinate sciatica. One glassful twice a day for one month.</p>
17.	<i>Ocimum gratissimum</i> Linn.	Ban tulsi	Labiatae	Leaf	<p><b>Headache</b> - One or two drops of leaf juice is put into nose to cure headache, twice a day with the help of cotton.</p>
18.	<i>Phyllanthus niruri</i>	Bhui aonla	Euphorbiaceae	Fruit	<p><b>Jaundice</b> - One teaspoonful of fruits are given thrice a day for one week.</p> <p><b>Piles</b> - Fresh fruits paste is applied on affected part for 2-3 hours once a day for one week.</p>
19.	<i>Plumbago zeylanica</i> Linn.	Chitawar	Plumbaginaceae	Root	<p><b>Bodyache</b> - Roots paste is applied and massaged on the affected part twice a day for 2 week.</p> <p><b>Abdominal pain</b> - Ten grams of root and equal quantity of <i>Hemidesmus indicus</i> roots are crushed and taken with a glass of warm milk twice a day for 5 days.</p>
20.	<i>Porana paniculata</i> Roxb.	Masbandhi	Convolvulaceae	Root	<p><b>Wounds</b> - Root paste is applied as bandage for 4-5 days, to cure wounds.</p> <p><b>Abortion</b> - One teaspoonful root paste is taken with a cup of milk once a day for 5 days to about 3-4 months pregnancy.</p>
21.	<i>Saccolabium papillosum</i> Lindl.	Chingra mecha	Orchidaceae	whole plant	<p><b>Cracked bone</b>- The whole plant paste is applied on affected part as a bandage for 15 days.</p>
22.	<i>Scindapsus officinalis</i> Schott.	Gachpipal	Araceae	Stem bark	<p><b>Cracked bone</b> - Fresh stem bark paste is applied on affected part as a bandage for 15 days.</p> <p><b>Bodyache</b> - Stem bark paste is applied on the affected part, before bedtime for 8-10 days.</p> <p><b>Epilepsy</b> - Decoction of stem bark is taken one cup full twice a day for</p>

					15 days. <b>Kidney stone</b> - Decoction of fresh root taken twice a day for 20 days.
23.	<i>Schleichera oleosa</i> (Lour.) Merr.	Kusum	Sapindaceae	Oil	<b>Skin disease</b> - Oil is applied on affected part twice a day for 1 week to cure any type of skin disease. <b>After delivery</b> - Half a cup of oil given to the woman after delivery, twice a day for 3 days as a tonic. <b>Wounds</b> - Oil is applied on the affected part, thrice a day for 4-5 days. <b>Hair care</b> - Oil is used to prevent hair falling.
24.	<i>Sesbania grandiflora</i> Pers.	Agusti	Fabaceae	Stem bark	<b>Sunstroke</b> - The decoction of the stem bark is used against sunstroke, one glassful twice a day for 2 days which gives cooling effect to the body. <b>Healing of wounds</b> - Paste of stem bark applied on the affected part, twice a day for 4-5 days to healing of wounds.
25.	<i>Spilanthes acmella</i>	Akarkara	Asteraceae	Stem, Flower, Leaf,	<b>Paralysis</b> - Dried stem powder is mixed with oil of <i>Madhuca indica</i> and massaged twice a day for 20 days to cure paralysis. <b>Epilepsy</b> - Two heads (flower) are crushed and mixed with <i>Juggary</i> and taken thrice a day for 15 days to cure epilepsy. <b>Headache</b> - Leaf paste is applied on forehead twice a day for 4 days to cure headache. <b>Toothache</b> - Twig of the plant used as toothbrush twice a day for 2 week to cure toothache.
26	<i>Sterculia urens</i> Roxb.	Kurlu	Sterculiaceae	Twig	<b>Toothache</b> - Twig of the tree is used as a toothbrush twice a day for one week to cure toothache. <b>Sciatica</b> - Roots paste is applied on affected part as bandage once a day (till 3-4 hours) for two weeks.
27.	<i>Terminalia bellirica</i> Roxb.	Behra	Combretaceae	Fruit	<b>Black Hair</b> - Fruits bark mixed with equal quantity of <i>Shorea robusta</i> (Stem bark), <i>Terminalia chebula</i> (Fruits bark) and stem bark of <i>Syzygium cumini</i> . They are crushed and applied on hair for 2-3

					hours before hair wash once a week for one month which gives natural black and shiny hair. <b>Piles</b> - Fruits bark paste applied on piles twice a day for 4 days to cure piles.
28.	<i>Terminalia chebula</i> Retz.	<i>Harra</i>	Combretaceae	Fruit	<b>For Black hair</b> - Fruits bark is mixed with equal quantity of <i>Shorea robusta</i> (stem bark), <i>Terminalia bellirica</i> (Fruits bark) and stem bark of <i>Syzygium cumini</i> and crushed and applied on hair for 2-3 hours before hair wash once a week for one month, which gives natural black or shiny hair.

### Material and Method

During the ethnobotanical field survey of the state carried out extensive field studies September 2010 to January 2013 in three district Jashpur, Raigarh and Korba. Rest of one Korba district available the Birhors population data from Office of the Hill-Korwa and Birhor development agency, Jashpur. For the present study, survey was conducted in 3 tribal villages from each 10 blocks. During the course of the study regular field visits were carried out in the study area. Various methods of sampling were used for area selection and primary data collection. Ten blocks like Dharamjaigarh Gharghora, Tamnar, Lailunga, Kunkuri, Duldula, Kansabel, Bagicha, Pharsabahaar and Pathalgaon were covered. Interview schedule was used for collect information related with food habit, health, and about the use of medicinal plants, mode of administration, dosage and technique of diagnosing the diseases were collected through interview from the traditional healers (*Baiga, Vaidh*). Plants were collected as herbarium and photographs has taken on spot. Secondary data were collected from journals, books, reports and government offices to verify the health infrastructure facilities provided by the government.

### Discussion & Result

A large number of plant species occur in tribal inhabited localities of Jashpur, Raigarh and Korba districts . Looking to the intellectual property rights of indigenous people, documentation of such knowledge is necessary now a day. The people of Birhor community possess a vast knowledge regarding multifarious uses of plants. Almost all species are commonly available in the area but many people are not aware about their importance. Some species are facing threats due to various reasons and require immediate attention for their conservation. It is clear from observation that some species are also used for curing the cattle of tribals. Such information should be spread among other societies living in urban area and villages. Ethno-medicinal practice among the *Binjhar* is complex containing different treatment patterns i.e. herbal medicine, rituals, magico-religious treatment and allopathic medicines. They have their own concepts for a disease, cause of illness, diagnosis of disease and treatment of ailments.

Community based awareness programme should be organized to protect this community with the over dosage, accidental poisoning and chance contamination of these drugs. Local government officers should also establish a team of subject experts including local vaidhya, medical practitioners, botanist and anthropologist so that they can prepare a list of such plants giving details regarding their vernacular names, botanical names, toxicity of the particular plant part, method of reducing toxic effect and dosages. Authors should recommend that a bridge would be developed between *Birhor* traditional medicine and Modern medical system, which will help us to protect and conserve the traditional medical heritage as well as improve the utilization of modern medical facilities. Phyto-chemical or pharmacological investigation, nutritional analysis and clinical trials should be carried out to validate the claims. These information's may help the policymakers for adopting the proper healthcare measures and may provide a lead in the development of new drugs.

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