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**Deshmukh R.R**  
*Assistant Professor, Baburao Patil  
College of Arts and Science Angar  
Tal. Mohol Dist. Solapur  
Maharashtra, India.*

**Pardeshi V.N**  
*Retired Head Department of Botany  
Saraswati Bhuvan College of Science  
Aurangabad Maharashtra, India.*

## Disease Diagnosis and treatment methods of herbalist in Gautala Autram – Ghat area of Marathwada, State Maharashtra

**Deshmukh R.R., Pardeshi V.N.**

### ABSTRACT

Present paper explores some of the concepts of disease diagnosis and method of treatment in Tribal healers of Gautala-Autram Ghat area of Marathwada. Tribal herbalist have their unique concepts about disease diagnosis and treatment different from Ayurveda based on simple logic and experience. The mode of treatment is simple with minimum restrains as compared to Ayurveda. The treatment change with age and sex. The mode of administration, preparation of drug and formulations are similar to Ayurvedic treatment but different mixtures were used by different herbalist for same disease. The duration of treatment is short; depend on disease to be treated and response of patient to drugs. In conclusion the tribal concepts indicate their origin in Ayurveda but many have indigenous roots; based on personal experience and oral tradition.

**Keywords:** Tribals, Disease diagnosis, Ayurveda, mode of administration, formulations

### 1. Introduction

In order to deal with plant medicines in an ethno-medical context, it is necessary to understand the local views of medicine and healing. The traditional views of healing and the logic behind treatment methods are very important for understanding ethnomedicine. Present paper reveals the data gathered during ethno botanical exploration of Marathwada region.

### 2. Method of Study

The present study is based on first-hand information collected in field work from Gautala-Autram ghat of Marathwada region in Maharashtra by using anthropological tools and techniques such as observation, interview and case study method. An in depth anthropological field work was conducted on Thakur tribe of region to understand their indigenous knowledge on medicinal plants, preparation of medicines and methods of using them for curing their various diseases. During the course of exploration 15 tribal healers from different localities of region were selected based on their previous patient records, cure percentage, logical thinking, eagerness about explaining and sharing views with investigator and repute in local community. The topics of discussions were disease diagnosis, mode of plant usage. Perspectives on health and healing were also discussed in the course of informal conversation. Questionnaires were filled up about questions like possible mode of action of medicines and the contexts they are used. The answers of such questions may be unintended responses sometimes incorrect or it may have specific criteria for disease diagnosis and treatment, relationship between disease, botanical knowledge and mood and intention of sharing knowledge with the investigator. There is no adequate data available for study area on the healing practices of tribal communities. Few anthropological studies have been carried out about tribal methods of disease diagnosis among tribes of India. However studies in tribes of Marathwada are lacking. The Social and Cultural Context of Medicine was explained <sup>[1]</sup>. Tribal concepts of disease diagnosis and method of treatment and psychotherapeutic methods of healing <sup>[2]</sup>. Ethnobiological aspect of folklore medicines among the communities of Manipur <sup>[3]</sup>. Disease diagnosis and method of treatment among tribal groups of North-East India was described <sup>[4]</sup>. Anthropological interpretation of medicine along with absolute models of disease etiology and cure <sup>[5]</sup>. Ode of knowledge acquisition among tribes of South India <sup>[6]</sup> tribal system of medicine by Gonds and Baigas <sup>[7]</sup>. Traditional medicinal practices among the Bhutia-Lepchas of Sikkim <sup>[8]</sup>. Mutharayappa worked on disease diagnosis methods of tribal's in Karnataka <sup>[9]</sup>. Method of disease diagnosis based on pulse beat and treatment among the Zeme Nagas of North Cachar Hills in Assam was worked on <sup>[10]</sup>. Validation of medicines by trial and error process in tribes of Chhattisgarh <sup>[12]</sup>.

**Correspondence:**  
**Deshmukh R.R**  
Assistant Professor, Baburao Patil  
College of Arts and Science Angar  
Tal. Mohol Dist. Solapur  
Maharashtra, India.  
Email: [pankjaksh@rediffmail.com](mailto:pankjaksh@rediffmail.com)

Tribal beliefs about evil spirits and disease diagnosis <sup>[14]</sup>. A strong degree of convergence in shared perception between Trio ethnomedical and Western biomedical systems was worked out in studies among shamans of Suriname <sup>[15]</sup>. The concept of health and illness among tribals of santhals tribes in Orissa was worked out <sup>[16]</sup>. There is ruthless destruction of the forests leading to the disappearance of the various medicinal herbs from Marathwada region. There are many herbs in the tribal areas of Marathwada whose medicinal values and usefulness in curing the diseases are known which need to be documented, present study is the first hand information in this regard.

## 2.1 Study area

Aurangabad forest division lies between 18°, 10' and 20°, 45' North latitude and 74°, 30', 76°, 40' to east longitude. Gautala-Autram ghat wildlife sanctuary has total area of 849.19 Sq. Km. which is about 4.76% of total area of region. Forest occurs in patches of varying width and much diffused due to agriculture practices in forest division itself. Most of the area lies on northern region of Aurangabad district of Maharashtra with boundary of adjoining Khandesh Plain. Half of the sanctuary extends in Jalgaon District of North Maharashtra including Chalisgaon and nearby area.

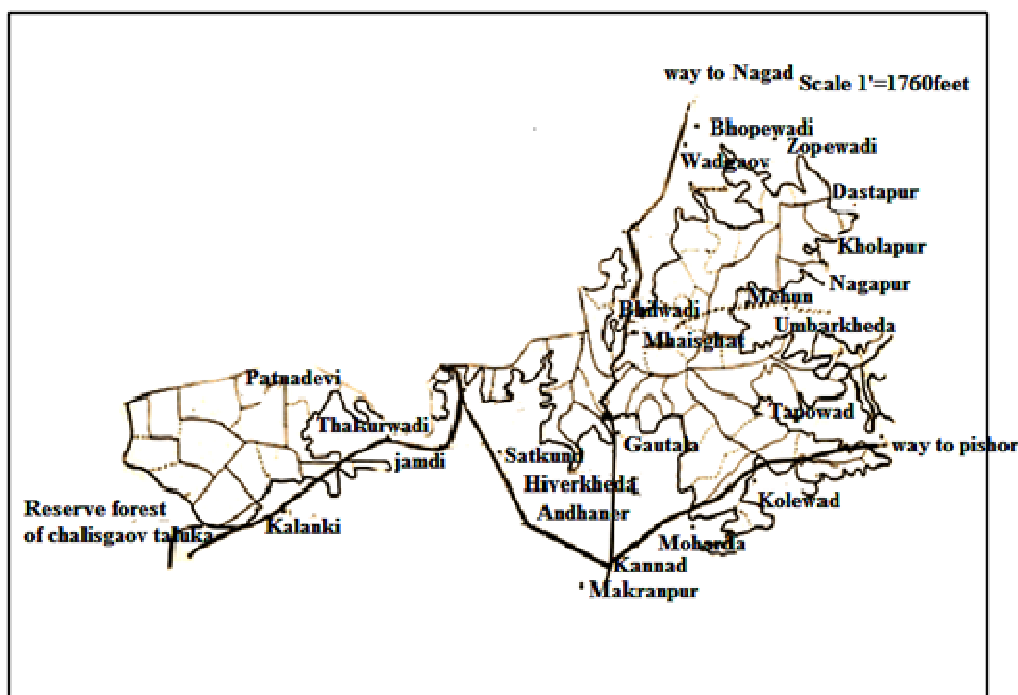


Fig.1 Map of Study area

## 3. Results

### 3.1 The concept of disease diagnosis

The science of diagnosis revolves around ascertaining and fixing the disease cause and application of various medicinal combinations of herbs for the treatment of that disease. The diagnosis and cause of disease show similarity with views in traditional system of Ayurveda but diagnosis is not in detail account as discussed in Ayurveda but based on simple common sense and long experience of treating diseases. The conceptual structures used by herbalist differ in most cases from those derived from western medicinal practices. Traditional medicine is based on the needs of individuals. Different people may receive different treatments even if they suffer from the same disease. Traditional medicine is based on a belief that each individual has his or her own constitution and social circumstances which result in different reactions to “causes of disease” and treatment. Traditional medicine applies a holistic approach to living. It considers a person in his or her totality ecological besides giving medicine to eat; traditional practitioners usually provide advice on lifestyles and healthy behavior. In view of herbalist, the method of treatment, way of diagnosis, various types of test recommended by Allopathic Doctors generally which show normal values of body fluids in maximum number of patients,

so we can say that Allopathic doctors are unable to make the right diagnosis at earliest of time, and clinical test they recommend to perform are just act or play for money only. Again when disease diagnosis is wrong it is not possible to prescribe right medicine. Herbalists carefully observe and interpret symptoms of disease and relate those symptoms logically with the type of symptom or disease previously diagnosed and successfully treated. Right diagnosis at right time is key in disease curing even though it is very difficult task and require long experience. With regard to earnings, in some areas healers receive hardly any payment at all. Healers reportedly earn only respect and social repute and they will be helped by their communities in times of need. More commonly however, healers may be paid in cash or in form of useful forest products, grains like jowar, wheat or field produce in form of fruits or vegetables.

### 3.2 Preliminary diagnosis by checking pulse beat:

According to tribal healer irregularity in function of any system of body is the main cause of disease. The organ functioning abnormally is diagnosed on the basis of symptoms. The disease diagnosis is based on pulse check and analysis of symptoms. Pulse is checked by holding the hand of patient and keeping thumb on artery at wrist. The pulse can be

felt at thumb. According to tribal healer each person has three type of pulse one pulse showing normal functioning of all organs of body if such pulse is detected the person is said to be normal without any disease. This is also called as first pulse of healthy person. If the person is suffering from fever or diseases having the symptom of fever i.e. any disease caused due to increase in heat in body then pulse will run fast as body heat has increased that will cause the blood to run faster that can be felt in pulse. The same type of pulse with various changes can be felt in diseases originating due to changes in body fluids that lead to increase in body heat. The slight changes in pulse felt by thumb will lead to disease diagnosis and according to tribal healer right diagnosis requires long experience and it doesn't come by just holding the patients hand but one needs a diagnostic and analytical mindset accompanied by long experience. Also a patient suffering from general weakness or weakness due to disease show increased pulse rate as body tries to maintain steady condition of body by increasing blood flow rate. The pulse runs slow when a person is suffering from diseases caused by cold. In this case also the minute changes in pulse felt by herbalist will lead to disease diagnosis. Coldness in body slows down blood flow that leads to slow pulse. All the pulmonary diseases, rheumatoid disorders, some hepatic diseases will be diagnosed in patients showing such pulse.

The second type of pulse can be felt at middle of hand when patient is suffering from any serious illness and if disease has changed its step from preliminary to next advanced stage. In such cases sure herbal treatments are employed to lower down the disease symptom and preventing its further increase and when disease come on lower stage then it can be treated with common medicine. In word of herbalist the third pulse called 'Dev nadi' can be felt in person when patient is going to die soon and characteristic pulse is felt to hand as it is very difficult for soul to leave the body. In such cases herbalist do not try their medicines and treats the patient only if there are chances of curing. In some cases particularly in rheumatism pulse at elbow is checked. According to herbalist by checking pulse at elbow he will be able to diagnose about disease spread and joint condition if they are healthy and curable or not. when the person is suffering from headache, vertigo, sleeplessness, fever in brain or idiotic symptoms then pulse of brain is checked, in this case thumb and first finger will be hold tight near the eyes but on forehead, this help the herbalist to diagnose about the mind state of person.

### 3.4 Symptom analysis

Disease diagnosis is based on looking at the tongue, pupil of the eye, temperature of the body, complexion variation on face and body. Also various questions will be asked to the patients for knowing the symptoms in detail. If patient complaints about pain at any part of body particularly the pain in stomach and lower abdominal region is checked by hand and actual pain areas are located on the basis of which diagnosis of disease will be made. If there is pain in left side of abdomen the patient may be suffering from liver or kidney troubles. Patient is asked if there is pain in lower half of abdomen after drinking water then patient may be suffering from any disease related to kidney. Patients are asked about if they sweat during day or night particularly after the symptoms of disease start to appear. The nature of sweat is considered of two type hot and

cold one. As per patient describe the nature of sweat and diagnosed by herbalist hot sweat is sweat due to fever i.e. patient feel heavy heat in body and later on sweats to relive trouble but definitely such sweating is different from sweat due heat of sun or common heat. Cold sweat is a meager sweat that comes from body and as the patient describes it, it is a kind of humid and unhealthy sweating particularly during disease conditions. Patient feels increase in heart beat and weakness due to unhealthy condition of body after such sweating. According to considerations of herbalist human body is made up of multiple systems those work coordinately that lead to healthy condition of body. The imbalance in body system leads to disease condition. Also the body temperature and environment in which we live definitely have profound influence on body. Body heat should match with environment heat. If temperature of body is more and outer environment is cold and if this coldness is absorbed by body there occur cold – hot clash in body that lead to disease such as fever, cold, cough asthma. Increase in body heat lead to unhealthy condition causing weakness if neglected the disease proliferates, get established in body cause chronic fever that results into Jaundice. According to herbalist the next step of disease is severe pneumonia or chronic jaundice which is incurable leading to death of patient. According to herbalist all diseases showing symptom of fever have root in chronic fever. Patients may be suffering from fever from months together but generally ignore it that later on lead to severe diseases. According to herbalist any disease has definite steps which are passed stepwise by the body leading to severe symptoms if not properly diagnosed and treated. The step of disease can be checked by checking pulse of patient and other body examinations, asking questions about symptoms he is experiencing according the spread of disease in body is diagnosed and accordingly medicine will be employed.

### 3.5 Method of treatment

Antagonist strategy is applied for treatment of disease. If the disease has origin in increase in body heat, cooling and soothing herbal drugs are employed in form of mixtures of cooling and tonic drugs that helps in cooling the body and boost immune power. Exactly opposite condition will be seen in disease originating from cold. To treat cold related diseases the medicine increasing body heat is employed. In some cases however hot drugs are employed and when disease reaches at its peak suddenly cooling drugs are employed that lead to sudden cure of disease. It was claimed by herbalist that heavy weight fatty individuals catch any type of disease because fat body acts as insulator i.e. as and when any type of disease enter in body these diseases remain persistent throughout the year or life as fat in body nourishes disease. Excessive fat on body is considered as unhealthy condition of body. The concept about chronic diseases and their origin described in views of herbalist are very interesting. They are based on simple logic and common sense. Some time they are based on information received in discussion with other herbalist and analysis of diagnosis and treatment given by allopathic doctors. It was observed that herbalist was very much clear about their concept of disease and they do accept views of other practioners. The common disease recorded in this region includes digestive system disorders, rheumatic disorders, hepatic disorders, fevers, and skin infections. This is

confirmed by the large number of plant species used for treatment of such diseases with various modes of administration. Some species are used in the treatment of more than one disease and these are very important herbal remedies for herbalist.

Following are some of the considerations of herbalist about few important diseases.

### 3.6 Rheumatism and arthritis:

In view of herbalist main cause of Rheumatism is coldness and change in weather to cold lead to symptom enhancement in patients or outbreak of disease. Some of the interesting views of herbalist have been recorded about this disease. According to herbalist Rheumatism is kind of *Vatta* or air borne disease. It may arise due to heat or cold wave and combination of both that lead to various kinds of diseases and accordingly their names are given. It may be '*Ushna –vatta*' or heat wave when mixed with cold wave lead to disease related to lungs, asthma, bronchitis, cough in medical terms. Other types of vatta described by herbalist were *Mungi – watta* in which a single finger of feet or hand do not show movement. Various cases of rheumatism and arthritis were described by herbalist. According to herbalist rheumatism is cold wave disease and women are more prone to disease because they lose joint fluids more early as compared to men. According to herbalist the disease arise due to constant labor in cold environment particularly during winter season. The diagnosis of disease is based on symptoms and pulse check generally pulse will be changed to slower level due to the disease. Different questions will be asked by herbalist about symptoms of disease to know about starting of symptoms, if patient sweat at night, nature of joint pain. Joints will be checked by touching hands or if there is any deformity in bones or joint and accordingly condition of patient is diagnosed and level or step of disease is decided. According to herbalist due to obstacles in flow of body fluids of cause deformed organs cause pains or become insensitive. Oral drugs are prescribed to treat these diseases in a form of pill. The diagnosis of disease is confirmed on the basis of symptoms particularly deformities in extremities, body ache, joint pains.

### 3.7 Liver disorders:

Herbalist describes symptoms of this disease such as stiffening of abdominal portion of patient with common complaint of indigestion. Constant indigestion leads to weakness those results into fever, headache these symptoms may lead to severe liver problems. Confirmative systems related to disease are bodily temperature detected by herbalist, pulse run.

### 3.8 Jaundice

According to herbalist jaundice is a disease caused by microbes. Jaundice lead to increase in acid in body spreading throughout the body leading to symptoms like yellow eyes, palms and other body parts. Treatment of jaundice is considered as very tedious and specific drugs are employed for its treatment. Generally cooling and reliving drugs along with tonic drugs are used to treat this disease. Conformation of disease on the basis of yellowing of eye, bodily weakness, chronic fever. Incurable jaundice leads to pneumonia with final step of Jaundice. In some cases according to herbalist fever affects normal functioning of brain and disease become

incurable.

### 3.9 Diarrhea or Dysentery

Diarrhea or dysentery may arise from microbes or increase in body heat. According to herbalist body tries to maintain balance by removing heat through diarrhea or dysentery. Also the attack of microbe increase body heat that causes fever and dysentery.

### 3.10 High Blood pressure

According to herbalist the disease may arise due to water imbalance in body. A particular type of heat is developed inside the body that cause severe thrust to patient. In such cases if patient drinks water in more amounts it lead to water imbalance inside the body that causes blood pressure. But according to herbalist high blood pressure is related to brain and heart and main cause of this disease is fear of something. One of another consideration about high blood pressure is that this disease may arise due excess sexual activity. According to herbalist such activities cause big loss of satva or divine fluid from body due to which brain weakens that lead to increase in blood pressure. The conformation of disease is on the basis of symptoms discussed with herbalist like unconsciousness, high pulse rate, vertigo, excess fat on body and previous case history of patient.

### 3.11 Bronchitis and asthma

According to herbalist these diseases arises due to coldness in atmosphere that is absorbed by the body leading to weakness and patient become unable to breath normally leading to cough if neglected leads to whooping cough. Due to constant cough there is pressure on pulmonary track it becomes narrow that causes difficulty in breathing leading to bronchitis or asthma. Herbalist was also found to be aware of allergic asthma. Conformation of disease is on the basis of low pulse, high breathing rate with body stress, sound produced by pulmonary tract while normal breathing.

### 3.12 Piles

According to herbalist piles is due to increase in body heat also more spicy diet may cause piles as all the spices used for preparation of spicy food increase body heat that cause piles. According to herbalist each individual has piles but only in some conditions when body heat is increased it causes trouble or disease. According to herbalist there are three types of piles that are very much similar described in Ayurveda and known according to local name. Generally tonic or aphrodisiac medicine is employed to treat these diseases that minimize body heat and piles automatically get reduced as body heat is minimized. Conformation of disease is on the basis of symptoms described by patient about nature of piles.

### 3.13 Skin diseases and dermal infections

According to herbalist skin diseases are caused due to unhygienic habits or due to impure blood that is reflected as skin disease. External application of drug that removes all microbes at diseased portion of body and other medicine is given orally for blood purification so that infections do spread in body.

Skin diseases are not common in tribal communities but local people suffer from such diseases. It is interesting to note that even though many tribal communities leave in unhygienic

conditions; without bath for three to four days, they rarely suffer from skin infections it may be due to less interaction with local people the spread of such contagious diseases do not occur in tribal communities. Conformation of disease is on the basis of external symptoms of disease.

### 3.14 Diabetes

In view of herbalist diabetes arises due to excessive rest and less movement of body during routine life activities. Due to muscular work or sweat sugar gets leached out from body. According to herbalist sugar is essential for body to perform daily activities but its excess storage in body lead to diabetes. According to herbalist patient should exercise routinely along with medicine treatment so that sugar may be removed from body through sweat. Generally previously diagnosed patients for diabetes are treated with tribal medicine. Herbalist asks about level of sugar detected with biomedical instruments and accordingly dosage of herbal drug will be prescribed.

### 3.15 Heart attack

The chances of heart attack increased due to lethargic life style. To treat this disease heat producing medicine will be used as it will dissolve out fat that form obstacles in normal movement of water. Excessive sweating, unconsciousness, chest pain and specific pulse sensed in patient confirm heart attack in patient.

### 3.16 Herpes

According to herbalist disease runs in specific manner throughout the body and it should be stopped below waist otherwise it becomes uncontrolled. Its run is restricted to few areas on body and after restricting flow of disease the disease is leached out from body by using medicine and then treatment specific to Herpes disease will be given to patient. Conformation of disease is through symptoms specific to disease that includes excessive itching and reddening of body, sores and excess fever.

### 3.17 Kidney stones

It may arise due to polluted water. Kidney stone arises due collection of salts at kidney or urine passage that lead to kidney stone. To treat this disease heat producing medicine is employed that dissolves these stones clearing the passage to urine leading to disease recovery. Conformation of disease is on basis of symptoms shown by patient. Pain at lower abdomen, scanty painful urination are said to be confirmative symptoms related to disease.

### 3.18 Deafness

Fever in brain is cause of deafness. Fever causes sweetening in brain that percolates in body leading to deafness. Drugs employed cause excess sweat for removing sweat from body so medicine that increase body heat will be given to patient and later on the medicine that nourishes brain is employed.

### 3.19 Cancer

The diseases arise due to microbes that infect our body. Cancer can be treated with herbals at early stages only. Conformation of disease is on basis of symptoms. According to herbalist patient suffering from cancer sees stars in day light. The nature of tumor is also checked by herbalist. Itchy,

painless tumors are said to be cancer tumors. Stiffness of tumor is also one of the criteria for confirmation of disease.

### 3.20 Tuberculosis

According to herbalist Tuberculosis caused microbes and its origin is in chronic fever. Excess of sexual intercourse also causes tuberculosis. Conformation of disease is on basis of body symptoms; it includes chronic cough, body weakness, pale face, anorexia and believing previous diagnosis of Tuberculosis in patient.

### 3.21 Aches and Pains

This class includes backache, painful joints, rheumatic pains, headache and general body ache. In referring to the backache, included are pains emanating from the spinal cord, pains from kidney and even pains due to other gastrointestinal diseases. Most of the treatment for pain involves local application of leaves as raw, leaf paste, levigate paste of roots, tubers. Additions of supplementary ingredients in various paste formulation is an important aspect of treatment. Use of goat's urine, human saliva, in veterinary treatment use of various chemicals is tried for enhancing drug action for early healing.

### 3.22 Circulatory System Disorders

Diseases like *Nas -vatta*, *Mungi vatta*, *Chamakvatta* come under this criteria. In *Nas vatta* there is defect in blood circulation to particular body part leading to abnormal function of that part. In *Mungi vatta* there is less supply of blood to particular organ of body leading to anteing. In *Chamakvatta* problem in blood circulation to organ leading to interrupted blood supply causing spasm or sprain in muscles. Such diseases are treated with various drugs like use of blood purifiers and external application of drug to remove obstacles in blood circulation.

### 3.23 Fever

The most common fevers in area are common cold fever, malarial fever and fever due to cough and chronic fever in some cases. The common way of treatment of fevers is use of decoction of leaves, barks in specific amounts and relieving soothing drugs are employed for treatment.

### 3.24 Wounds, Sores and Cuts

The treatment for wounds and cuts are quite varied depending on the type of wounds, sores or cuts. External application of leaf paste, root paste is mode of drug administration, local healing of wound and prevention of spread of disease to other parts of body is criteria applied for treatment.

Along with herbal medicine treatment food and self-restraint is a part of the disease treatment and healthy lifestyle and prolonged use of tonics. In general treatment for chronic diseases run longer (ranging from weeks to months, depending on the nature of the illness) for permanent cure of disease. Furthermore, regular dose of medicine help in early healing and interrupted use of drugs enhance the disease. Common restrains for specific diseases recorded during study along with diseases are given below.

### 3.25 Restrains in Rheumatism or Arthritis or any disease related to *vatt vikaras*

Tea made from jaggery is recommended sugar tea is

restrained. Rice, Brinjal, Potato, clusterbean, gram are the main vegetarian restrains as these act as supportive food for disease and retard the activity of medicine. For patients who prefer non vegetarian food meat of chicken, fish is strictly prohibited but meat of goat is recommended with lesser fats and helps to combat the disease. Use of oily food is also prohibited. Use of ghee (cow or buffalo fat) is recommended as it increases the lubrication between two joints but its excess use is also restrained.

### 3.26 Restrains in pulmonary diseases

Anything that increase coldness in body should be avoided. Cold water early in morning, banana, and custard apple should be avoided. Less oily but spicy food is recommended. Meat is recommended.

### 3.27 Restrains in hepatic disorders

Oily food should be strictly avoided. Patient should strictly abstain from non-vegetarian food of any type.

### 3.28 Restrains in dermal infections

Oil and salt is main restrain in dermal infections. It is claimed that it helps in proliferation of disease. Also spicy food and particularly non vegetarian food should be avoided.

### 3.29 Restrains for digestive system disorders

Food that increase gases and constipation in stomach should be avoided, particularly gram dal (*Cicer arietinum L.*) should be avoided. Bread of jowar *Sorghum dochna* (Forssk.) Snowden var. *pulchrum* (Burkill) Snowden is recommended.

### 3.30 Restrains in diabetes, B.P., Piles

Bitter food is recommended in diabetes as bitterness in body kills sweetness increased in body due to disease. In diabetes there is no restriction on sugar but sugar in form of jaggery is recommended. According to herbalist sugar is essential for body if one abstain from sugar completely it is very difficult for person to carry out routine activity as it is main source of fuel or energy to the body.

In cases of B.P. use of salt should be minimized as possible and intake of oily food should be avoided. As excessive rest and psychological tensions is main cause of disease person should work hard and always should try to avoid mental tensions. In cases of piles any type oily and spicy food should be avoided. Excess use of pure ghee is recommended as it lubricates the digestive tract and helps in easy defecation.

Plants are also classified according to nature of drug it contains i.e. hot, sweet, bitter, burning, sour, aromatic, cooling and, nutritive and accordingly drugs are employed.

## 4. Conclusion:

During the study it was noticed that tribal communities have little access to basic health facilities. They are most exploited, neglected, and vulnerable to diseases with high degree of malnutrition<sup>[17]</sup>. Poverty, illiteracy, ignorance to diseases, poor hygiene is the main causes of prevailing diseases in community. Interestingly magico religious beliefs were lacking in tribal communities of Gautala Autram Ghat sanctuary. The system of medicine is found to be influenced by Ayurvedic system but also have its own indigenous concepts based on practical experience during disease

treatment. There is greater need of collaboration between traditional medical practitioners and government health care to integrate the traditional medicine systems with the modern. This is essential in remote tribal areas which are mostly inaccessible and lack communications. Though the traditional outlook, customs, rituals, beliefs, habits and concepts of symptoms, as well as diagnosis and treatment of diseases are changing fast under the impact of an ongoing modernization process traditional system of medicine still prevail in tribal communities of area due to easy availability at cheaper rates. Anthropological interpretation of medicine provides specific ideas on the process of cultural relativism in the attempt of exploration of the absolutist models of disease etiology and cure<sup>[18]</sup>. The tribal societies have their own concept of diseases thorough knowledge of the indigenous medical beliefs and practices and the different cultural values attached to them has to be acquired and then the modern medicine has to be introduced in a phased manner side by side with the native medicines traditionally rooted in magic, mythology, legend, religion and morality<sup>[19]</sup>.

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