

## CHAPTER-4

### INDIGENOUS MEDICAL SYSTEM AND PRACTICES

The peculiar geographical characteristics of North Bengal left a deep impact on its population structure. North Bengal was like an ethnological museum of India. People of different religion, caste, culture and linguistic group were living side by side in this region. Majority part of the population of North Bengal were the tribes and sub tribes who were also the original inhabitants of the area. They mainly resided close to nature in the hills, in the jungles of Duars and Terai, in tea gardens and some parts of the plains also. The principal indigenous communities were the Nepalis, Lepchas, Sherpas, Tamangs, Bhutias, Rais, Damais, Drukpas, Sarkis, Limbus, Magars, Thakalis, Gaines, Thakuris, Chakmas, Totoes, Meches, Dhimals, Garos, Newars, Rajbanshis, Ravas, Malpaharis, Oraons, Mundas, Santals, Kharias, Mahalis etc.<sup>1</sup>The purpose of the chapter is to focus on the health practices of the indigenous people. The average birth rate was high among a large number of tribes, while in case of some tribal communities the growth rate was very much low causing harm to their existence. Thus it is necessary to study the health care and medicinal practices of the indigenous people of North Bengal. With the development of industry difficulties arose in the health sector. New kind of diseases are appearing these days and to find out the causes of relief from them we have to search for a new way and also at the same time review the past for the remedy. Today the forests are going to fade away and it led to the destruction of various medicinal plants also. The medicinal plants and herbs are the main ingredients of medicine of the indigenous people of North Bengal. Thus their medicines were also going to be lost with the forests. As hunting also became prohibited the indigenous practitioners could not get animal ingredients for preparing their medicines. Thus the principal objective of the chapter is to focus on those issues.

The indigenous medical system of North Bengal had been classified into two parts – the health care and medicinal system of the indigenous population of the region or the folk medicine and the Ayurved, Unani, Homeopathy, Tibetan system of medicine etc. The indigenous system of medicine was the oldest system and still now are very much prevalent in different areas of North Bengal bearing the tradition of the past.

The folk medicine had become popular mainly in the villages. The villagers were indifferent to the political developments and commotions due to their relative self-sufficiency, comparative freedom and independence of the village society. Thus some practices of the ancient Indian culture were visible in the villages as also some practices of Ayurveda.<sup>2</sup> They believed that a good number of causes like impurities, bad weather, disappointment or anger of gods, evil spirits were the root causes of various diseases. For treatment of various diseases local ojhas were called . The ojhas ( village exorcists) by chanting mantras tried to satisfy the disappointed gods. They also took effort to please the offended gods and goddesses by offering both vegetable and animal products. In most of the cases the deities were the goddesses. For the treatment of the village communities herbs and shrubs were utilized immensely as raw materials for preparing medicines.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes the ojhas took liquor from the patient as fees. They often collected a black goat, a red cock and rupees 1.50. <sup>4</sup>

The indigenous people had evolved their own medicinal system based on traditional beliefs, cultures and practices. <sup>5</sup> As they were close to nature they used to seek their medicines in the nature and also worshipped the nature for physical healthiness. But when that failed they started to devote some deities. On the one hand they considered the deities responsible for their ailments and on the other hand also worshipped them for eradication of diseases. Most of them emphasized on cleanliness of environment, physical sanctity and domestic

tidiness and that were based on traditional beliefs. In some cases their health system had some scientific base also.

Sometimes the tribal people considered certain evil souls or sinister spirits responsible for different diseases. It seemed to them that the human society was engirted with various souls which used to live in forests, deserted house or graveyard. They made harm to people directly or influenced by some one when they got disappointed. They were not visible, but their existence could be perceived. Now and then they also deluded human being by getting different shapes and figures. <sup>6</sup>

In tribal society the tribal people were influenced by the impact of magic especially black or harmful magic. The disease created by black magic could be cured by the use of white or efficacious magic. The magician after creating an image of the specific person by mud or sand, pierced an incanted iron skewer on it. The person began to ill within a few days. In certain cases the charmer also bewitched a distinct part of the body of a particular person and made him ailing. Some people, efficient in black art also applied a special kind of medicine (made of herbal, animal or mineral products) in the body of the person with his or her food or drink or any other medicine.

The tribal people accused the dains or witches for performing many evil deeds like sudden death of children, death due to snake bite, excessive pain and trouble during delivery of pregnant women, the state of being emaciated (ricket), fever, dysentery etc.

Among the people of the ethnic communities a considerable number of injunctions and prohibitions prevailed from generation to generation. They believed that if they disobeyed that taboos, they would be attacked by different diseases. The customary taboos were like if anybody showed his or her finger towards the rainbow, the finger would be curved, fever would come if glow

worm could be caught at night, the condition of the eyes worsened if anybody did use comb on hair in course of disease of the eye etc.

They also specified some persons as ominous whose sights according to them could be harmful for human health. A baby might be ill, a man who was taking meal could experience dysentery, a tree bearing fruits would face death as a result of evil sight.

Apart from supernatural causes, the tribal people had also been attacked with diseases occurred due to natural reasons like climatic disorder, change of weather, spread of bacillus, poisonous food, untidiness, indiscipline in life style etc. Dysentery and diarrhoea appeared due to germ infection and poisonous food. Syphilis was the outcome of intemperance in practice and conduct. In those cases the tribal people took the help of the ojhas who treated the patients by applying various herbal, animal and mineral drugs.<sup>7</sup>

In tribal medical system two types of treatment was prevailed - preventive and remedial or curative. As a preventive medical system armour, amulet, talisman, herbal drugs, occult method of charming, enchantment were experienced. On the otherhand, magic, illusion, prayer, sacrifice, use of herbal, mineral and animal drugs, incantation were adopted as part of remedial measure. The chief diseases of the tribal people were dysentery, diarrhoea, fever, different kind of sores, malaria, leprosy, eye disease and several venereal diseases.

As North Bengal was encircled by dense forests, high hills and innumerable rivers, it was also a resort of different variety of snakes. W.W. Hunter accounted that in 1890 in Bengal about 21,412 people died out of snake bite and 5106 snakes were caught by giving reward of rupees 19,004.<sup>8</sup> Some tribal people worshipped the snake as deity. In North Bengal the deity of Bisahari and Manasha were worshipped profusely all through the Bengali month of

Sravana in rainy season. They people that snakes could not grip anyone, wicked person bearing the form of snake had seized some one. In that particular case an exorcist or ojha used to come and he gave some tight knot on the wound of the affected person. After that he shouted some different magical whims on the head and body of the patient. The ojha then gave the patient tulsi (basil) leaf, neem (margosa) leaf, chilly, lemon and other medicines to eat.

In Cooch Behar an ojha named Satish ojha was very much popular. He was not only an expert in catching snakes but also in making treatment of snake bite. He had some cowries or snail-like gasteropod resembling miniature conches which he threw on the head of the snake and it died. The ojha also collected rice from five or six houses and assembled them in a small bundle of cloth. Then he flung to the ground violently the bundle containing rice in front of the wounded person and also recited some montros or mystic words. <sup>9</sup> After some time the patient returned back his sense and cured. Even at present time also the goddess Manasha has been worshipped immensely.

The folk medical system was in unwritten form, and its basic theory was based on natural and supernatural ideas. Usually the practitioners and ingredients of folk medicine were both collected from the local area. The medical system was continuing from generation to generation or teacher- pupil tradition. Magic, prayer, incantation, sacrifice, sorcery, and various herbal, animal and mineral medicines were incorporated in the scenario of folk medicine. Though the primary principle or the fundamental truth of the various tribes of North Bengal was same, but there were little differences in the case of ingredients of medicine, the magical mantras , deity and belief regarding treatment and rules and regulations to follow them.

Among the various indigenous communities of North Bengal the health care and medicinal practices of some tribes are being discussed here. In North Bengal the indigenous communities the Rajbanshis had acquired an eminent

position from the point of view of population, social customs, language and cultural practices. The Rajbanshis predominated in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri , Dinajpur and Rangpur districts. <sup>10</sup> The Rajbanshis suffered from various diseases throughout the year like fever (jar), cholera (dhum) small pox (basanta) ,olaota (bhed boomi),measles (khesra), dysentery (bindisor), consumption (rajbiadi), jaundice (pandur), cough (kas ,kop),giddiness (chok), rheumatism (bat rog), epistaxis (bleeding of nose), colic (bis), asthma (susai), night blindness (andha sula) etc.

In the period under review if anybody was attacked with a disease it would be termed as "deodhora". The inner meaning of the term was that instead of doctor an exorcist would be called, because he could alone find out the causes of diseases and only his exclusive treatment could make the unhealthy completely in good health. The Rajbanshi medical practitioners excelled in the treatment of wound, pimple and fracture.

Like many other indigenous communities of North Bengal the Rajbanshis believed that diseases originated due to evil spirits. Thus they undertook many measures to inactive and to make disappear the evil spirits. One of them was the act of expelling evil spirits by prayers, worshipping or magic words.<sup>11</sup> The method was known as Mohanti Kora. Treatment with herbs was another step undertaken by them to ward off the evil spirits. To eradicate fever the village exorcist worshipped to satisfy the evil spirit causing fever. It was a time taking process and the exorcist attempted repeatedly to exterminate the fever along with the evil spirit. The main ingredient of the worship was a pigeon. In the course of the puja (devotion) the ojha kept a pigeon in a cage to transfer the evil spirit into its body from the patient suffering from fever. When the fever was very much high the exorcist recited the following montro (incantation) over a pot of clean water and gave it to the patient to drink. He also created an ambiance of magic by blowing some air from his mouth to the body of the patient several times after uttering a part of the spell.

Dhumtore akas, dhumtore patal  
Nai tor pudzar porkas  
Has khalo paro khalo  
Sogger bura buri, soggo na gia  
Soggo na gia colo

Its meaning was that the evil spirit used to conceal its real appearance always and it never showed its face even at the time when puja was going on. The exorcist ordered or requested the spirit to return back to the heaven with ducks, pigeons and all meats along with the disease.

Unfortunately if the montro could not work another montro was recited in the same style as the previous one on the following day. The sorcerer waited for about three days. If that failed, he arranged another prayer . At that time the worshipping deity was Lord Shiva. The purpose of the puja was same- to exterminate the evil spirit and to incorporate the disease within himself. The puja was usually organised at day time. The devotee inherited the montros and the rules and regulations of the puja from his father or grand father .The exorcists generally belonged to a class by themselves and their profession was hereditary continuing from generation to generation.

In the prayer different kind of ingredients were required like two ripe plantain of two branches(about 32 bananas), five malbhog plantains, sugary puffed paddy(murki) of about half a seer, curd, milk-each one pot(about half a pound each), sugar (half pound), incense(dhup), wood-apple(bel), white flowers and one pair pigeons ect. The puja was arranged at the house of the ailing person. After the worship , some curd or milk was given to the diseased person to eat. Often a little sweetened puffed paddy ,curd and plantain were mixed and a little bit was also offered to him . After the puja the pigeons devoted to the gods were either sacrificed or made them free to fly by smattering some water on their heads and by reciting some incantation.

After then the exorcist took some water in a container and recited an incantation requesting earnestly to Lord Mahadev for driving away the evil spirit causing the disease. He also solicited the god to carry the disease with him while going back to his own kingdom at Kailas. Subsequently some water from the pot was offered to the patient for drinking.

Sometimes the Rajbanshi children up to ten years of age were suffering from the disease "pocchut kata" (rickets).<sup>12</sup> They gradually became debilitated and thus were continuously encircled with various diseases coming after one another. Some water collected from a river flowing towards north was cautiously kept in a mud vessel with exiguous gold and silver dipped in it and very small quantity of raw milk was mixed with it. An exorcist was summoned to the house of the ailing child. After reaching there he spoke some mystic words over the water and kept some dub grass on that water. The pot with the water was kept untouched overnight. During the following day when the sun was going to disappear from the sky the child was kept at a crossing of three roads and with him or her a plantain leaf and a knife were also taken. The child stood on the plantain leaf and placed on the tri-junction facing to the south. A robe was loosely tied round the waist of the child. The child was bathed with the processed water and then the string was cut. After that the child along with the mother would return back to home with out looking into the bathing place. The Rajbanshis believed wholeheartedly that after the aforesaid process of treatment the child would gradually regain good health.

Night blindness or "andha sula" was a common disease among the Rajbanshi people. In that disease three living glow-worms were poured into three pieces of ripe banana. It was their belief that the afflicted would devour entirely each piece of the plantain one by one every day and as a result would regain the lost sight. A portion of dry intestine of a cow was mixed with a little saliva of the mouth and then it was kept in the inner canthus of the affected eye. It was like an

emollient application. Instantly the person was asked to view the stars at night. After that the story of andha sula was recited in front of the patient.

The "Bisua" festival was celebrated on first Bysak ( the first month of the Bengali calendar) of every year with the object of uprooting unhealthiness in the family and also removing the existence of evil spirit. <sup>13</sup> Paddy, chura(parched rice), chaoler-burbhura(crushed rice), chaoler bhajer jhaiya(powered rice after being roasted), soresar bhaji(fried mustard), sukatir bhaji(dry jute leaves fried), garlic, onions, ginger, and turmeric were collocated in a plate by the head male or female member of the family and were mingled properly. In that way a medicine was prepared, and each member of the family used to eat some of it. On the same day a few onion, ginger and garlic and 21 leaves of the jack fruit (*Artocarpus integrifolius*) tree were stiched together and were tied above the main entrance of each hut. Twenty leaves were kept for Bisua and one was for the knot of the string on which the leaves were tied as a witness.

The above process was performed to comply the deity with the hope that there might be no further deaths in the family throughout the year. Chirags (small earthen lamps) with mustard oil were also burnt over night. From the very first day of Bisua celebration a jhora had to be kept over the traditional tulsi tree. That consisted of tying an earthen pot was tied with a bamboo pole and was placed over the tree. A hole was made in the middle portion of the pot, and was filled with dub grass. The pot was then filled with water and it dropped through the grass on the tree . A lamp was kept lightning at every night, and water was poured every day in the mud vessel during the month of Bysack, with the belief that the tulsi tree might grow stronger and the deity would be pleased.

Among the Rajbanshis Chandi thakurani (Goddess Chandi) was regarded as a terrified goddess causing multifarious illness.<sup>14</sup> During the time of cholera outbreak, atfirst goddess Chandi was worshipped and complied. They considered that she was the originator of diseases including cholera. A buffalo

,calf or a goat were sacrificed to reduce her anger. The people were also petrified by the goddess Kali. Because they thought that she always attempted to destroy them by causing diseases . Hence she was worshipped very often and offerings of buffalo , goat etc were devoted to her.

Gram thakur (God) was another deity who was very much popular in the villages.<sup>15</sup> About 5 to 7 little huts were constructed for Gram thakur and his wife in the eastern side keeping some distance away from the houses. Some people erected a single hut for the two. It was believed that the Gram thakur brought sickness among children and was very much active during outbreaks of cholera. The people worshipped the deity with the offerings of dahi , chura etc and a lamp was also kept in his hut during the time of illness in the house.

Almost in all parts of North Bengal the Rajbanshis used to worship an awful male deity called "Masan". Masan was usually a god of village area. The intensity of the worship of Masan in the district of Cooch Behar was maximum .Probably it was due to the presence of majority number of Rajbanshi people in the region.

The Rajbanshis celebrated another festival called "Jitua" in the month of Assin (during October) by people who were involved in law cases or in whose house there might be sickness. A great number of green and ripe plantains were placed in a dala (plate or tray) and were devoted to the deity. The person who used to make offerings promised that, if he would win the legal case or if the ailing would regain his health, he would perform the Jitua ceremony for some days to satisfy Jit-bahah Tacur.

Certain superstitions prevailed among some of the Rajbanshis and those had affected the society in many ways. Like medicine could not be given to an ailing member of the family by a female member.<sup>16</sup> Because it was wrongly believed that medicine would not work if it was given by any female. In some

families fathers were not allowed to give medicine to their off springs. In those cases neighbours were called to give medicine.

The Garos were the primitive indigenous tribes of North Bengal long before the coming of the British in the region. The chief troublesome diseases among the Garos were fever (kalam), headache ( dakamsha), colic (sha), cholera( rok), dropsy (kanchikavartoa), goiter, cold (sopai), cough ( tokesptua), rheumatism, consumption (raj biadi) and bowel complaints. In sickness the huji (priest) was called in and he supplied different herbal medicines for different diseases. The supreme god of the Garos was Rishi.<sup>17</sup> Juggo was the husband of Rishi and he was also prayed. The Garos believed that both the deities were wandering in the huts of the Garos. In the Bengali month of Choitro or Baisakh a new bamboo called sirfak was cut and planted in the Hat- Kung (courtyard). The bamboo representing the existence of Rishi was kept with the hope that the house or village might be cleared from enemies, fire, sickness and other troubles. Rishi used to eat flesh of pigs and fowls. She also drank chokot(liquor). Juggo did not eat flesh, but took liquor. Rishi was much powerful than Juggo and for that reason a Garo man had to surrender completely to a Garo woman whole heartedly. Her caprices were laws to him.

There were other deities also among the Garos like Mohes Tacur, Mahakal and Lamengju .The Garos prayed before Grajjo . During the course of the prayer a thun or hut was set up and an idol of Lamengju was made with pith (sola) and was placed on the hut to respect the deity who probably brought cholera and all other serious diseases among the Garos. There was also a female god called Subachini among the Garos. The worship of the goddess Subachini was held in the month of Baisakh and was observed by all Garos. They devoted plantains, a male goat, two pigeons, along with pan and betel nut to the goddess Subachini to stay away from unhealthiness and diseases. Abet Rengge was a harmful deity among the Garos. If anybody refused to obey the deity he or she had to suffer from serious illness. Neori Simeri was also a destructive deity .Its main act was to

attack one's body with disease. Those who did not obey the god they had to face serious diseases and it resulted in even death. The deity Goera was also some times worshipped as the god of healthiness. <sup>18</sup>

The Garos believed in ghosts, ghouls and evil spirits. When they were attacked by grave diseases, they believed that some evil spirits took refuge within them. Thus they immediately worshipped those spirits to save themselves from diseases. They also believed certain mystic or esoteric words which were used during the time of worship. In general or normal diseases they did not go to doctors and treated the patients with the help of some herbs and made them well also. Even they successfully treated the patient injured by snake.<sup>19</sup>

The Garos generally burnt to ashes the dead bodies. In case of normal death due to old age or general disease they cremated the corpses. But if any body died due to some contagious diseases like small pox, leprosy, cholera or several other infectious diseases the Garos used to bury him. They also buried dead bodies in case of death due to snake or tiger injury or in accidental death. The reason was that probably they believed that germs from the human bodies died after suffering from infectious diseases would spread every where .

A large Bhutia village existed in Chunabatti within the Buxa sub-division of the Duars. Physically the Bhutias of Buxa were very much strong. The majority of them was short in height. But all were very hardy than the people of the plains. Most of them had a light olive complexion. But there were many dark-skinned Bhutias, whose features were very much similar with the Rajbanshis, the only difference between the two being the dress and language. According to the Bhutias the reason of their dark skin was due to a fever which was very much common prevalent in Chunabatti and at the foot of the hills. The fever used to blacken the face and body of the affected person. But it was also known from the local inhabitants that the dark Bhutias were the descendants of the Rajbanshi

women who were taken by force to Bhutan before the coming of the British in the Duars.<sup>20</sup>

Before the annexation of the Duars, a cantonment was remained at Buxa. The Bhutia village existed just above the then present cantonment area of Buxa. But as the people were very much dirty and unclean, the British dreaded that cholera would cause and affect the troops and thus the village was removed to Chunabatti, about a mile or two west of Buxa, where the Bhutias then remained. But unfortunately the Government of Bengal remained inactive and did not undertake any sanitary measure in the village where diseases repeatedly showed their ugly faces.

The Totos were the smallest tribes of West Bengal residing in Toto Para village of Madarihat police station of Alipurduar, a sub-division of Jalpaiguri. They were animists and very much superstitious. They had two supreme gods. The gods were Ishpa and Chima. Ishpa was believed to stay in the Boodoo hill. The Totos believed that diseases occurred when he was not satisfied. <sup>21</sup>Thus to satisfy the deity, pigs, cows and cocks were sacrificed to him. He did not like goats, fowls and pigeons. Drink called eu was also continuously offered to him. The goddess Chima was worshipped by the Totos to deactivate her anger or dissatisfaction and to save the village from various ailments. Offerings of alna rice, fowls and eu were given to her. As she also disliked cocks, pigs and pigeons those items were not offered to her.

The Totos had no priests. Every man worshipped the deities individually. When they worshipped the goddess Ishpa, they prepared a square place and made it clean and clear. They placed a plantain leaf on the field. Then some uncooked alua rice was kept on it and a kind of drink called eu was poured over the leaf. The liquor was fermented from rice, maize, marua and kauni. As it was their most favourite drink the Totos devoted that to their god. The other ingredients were some meat of the cow, pig and cock that might be killed and

also some of their blood and those were placed on the leaf. It pleased the deity. The deity Chima was being worshipped inside the house and the deity Ishpa was adored in the langang (courtyard).

The Totos organized another celebration for the betterment of themselves. It was called "Garom Puja" or prayer for the wellbeing of the whole village. Their celebration was for the removal of unhealthiness from the village. For their veneration they brought a priest crossing the boundaries of their villages. Some times the priest belonged to the Garo clan. Women were not permitted to be present at the puja. Probably as the priest came from outside of the Toto village the women were restricted to join the prayer. For the puja fifteen pigeons, two pigs, one duck, three goats (one white, one black, and one reddish), cocks and hens as many as possible and also eggs of hens were sacrificed.

A lot of sticks were also required for the prayer. Vermillion containing holy power was set aside on the top of each stick. After the completion of puja every top member of the family took one such stick and stroke the floor, the wall, the posts of his house and then carried the stick back to the puja place and left it there. The Totos believed that by the above religious procedure all ghosts and evil spirits causing diseases would be removed from their houses at least for one year.

The most consecrated worship among the Totos was the puja of Mahakali (Ishpa). The deity was so much wakeful that later on she was placed in the great temple of Totopara. The temple looked like a Toto house, though its size was large than that. It was accompanied by a group of other huts in the wide extended complex. There was no image of goddess Ishpa. The Goddess Mahakali was identified with two sanctified drums. Those drums were hanging from the roof of the temple. Wine and flesh were the supreme ingredients of the prayer. The wine was prepared in the wooden cup of the temple and flesh was boiled over the flame of the sacred "chulla" or furnace inside the temple.

The principal priest used to offer the liquor, the meat and rice to Mahakali and afterwards all the devotees used to eat the offerings. Only the Totos were entitled to enter within the temple during the puja. After the puja the main priests brought down the sacred drums and started the celestial music. The second class of priests joined in the song and then the whole assembly. During the course of the music all shouted at the top of their voice as if to reach the heaven. The Totos did dance during the puja. Males stood on one side and the females on the other. They stood face to face at a distance and did dance. Never the males and the females could dance together. In Toto society the influence of jhakri or ojha was immense. But they were like friends to the Totos. They were not identified as special privileged group like other purohitas or priests of various tribes. <sup>22</sup>

The Totos were reluctant to take medicine in their illness. In most cases the diseases cured naturally. The Totos believed that their diseases broke out due to evil spirits. Thus they devoted gods to reduce their anger and dissatisfaction towards them. They expelled evil spirits by prayers or magic words. During delivery they did not consult doctor and instead of that they did consult pau. One aged woman performed the delivery case as midwife. If any problem or complication did arise during pregnancy they did some magical activities to remove evil spirits by sacrificing pig or fowl. The umbilical cord was cut with a strip of bamboo piece. <sup>23</sup>

Many of the Totos suffered from ulcers, stones or leucoderma - like white patches on the face, hands and feet. Some times the nose swelled, became red and the face also became red. This was the symptom of leprosy. After partition of India in 1950 the Government of West Bengal sent a dermatologist for the first time to Totopara for investigation of the skin disease prevalent among the Totos. The skin specialist did not recognize the disease as leprosy (yaws). It was a

different disease. The disease probably enraged due to scarcity of better nutritious food and sufficient clothes. <sup>24</sup>

Dr. Ashish Dutta, L.M.S was deputed by the then Government of West Bengal as Welfare Organizer of Totopara in February 1956. He was the first man who made the Totos bound to accept western medicine. <sup>25</sup> In the year 1956 a health survey was also made. After the end of the survey in 1956 it was found that cough, carries, ulcer, leucoderma, Toto sore, yaws, swelling, dysentery, malaria were the most prevalent diseases among the Totoes.

Among the above diseases they suffered mainly from fevers, especially the malaria. They hesitated to touch cold water when they were affected by high fever. They did not use it even when advised to do so. They suffered from dysentery and other bowel complaints. The Government of West Bengal had appointed in Totopara a Welfare Officer. He was sent with sufficient medicines. At the initial stage they did not agree to take medicine. But later on they began to use western medicine. Causes of cholera, small pox, tuberculosis or any venereal disease were not found among them. They needed cheaper and better food, blankets in winter, umbrella during the rains ,soap for personal cleanliness and sufficient medicines. The ulcers and sores of their bodies gave them mental pressure. <sup>26</sup>

A story was popular among the Totos that when they entered to Bhutan from CoochBehar their women were very much pretty. But the people of Bhutan and Mech , Garo and others used to disturb and molest their women members and even took away some of them. They approached to Mahakali and she gifted the women bad ulcers and saved the women by making their faces ugly. <sup>27</sup>

The Totos believed that death came as a result of disease which was created by evil spirits. They satisfied those vice spirits by submitting fowls, pigs, etc to meet the requirements of the village magician. But often those sacrifices

were so much expensive that they had to borrow money from mahajans (money lenders) to fulfill those requirements.<sup>28</sup>

In 1967 the Swedish Mission, Cooch Behar Branch set up a dispensary at Totopara and John Lakra was made compounder of the dispensary. A duly qualified medical practitioner was also deputed by the Mission. From Cooch Behar he visited the dispensary once a month. The Totos started to come to the dispensary slowly. But the situation changed when Lakra suddenly left his job. Then a Garo couple named Harendra Mankim and Pritilata Mankim, coming from East Pakistan took the charge of the Mission dispensary of Totopara. Mrs Mankim used to do the activities of a midwife. Both of them extended their help for removing ailments of the Totos. Afterwards though the Mission was closed, but the Mankim family continued to extend their medicinal services. Through their services the Totos began to depend on western medicine gradually.

But inspite of the initiative taken by the government or the Swedish Mission to make the Totos familiar with western medicine, the Totos could not completely depend on it. At the initial stage of any disease they used their traditional way of treatment. Because they had firm belief on that. But their own system of treatment was sometimes so expensive that they had to borrow loans from money lenders for that. Those borrowing made them more poor than before.

The Mech, a Mongolian tribe, was nature loving and had preferred to settle in the hilly area of Darjeeling , Jalpaiguri & CoochBehar districts encircled by dense forests and near hill-streams for their living. They also settled in the portions of Bogra and Rangpur .Although now they had reclaimed much of the forest, they adhered to the rivers , but now they had hardly any need of it. In the last flood of the Tista in 1968 many villages were washed away but they came back as soon as some land appeared above the water with the cessation of the flood.

The following statement shows the number and distribution of the Mech tribe in 1872 and 1881 in North Bengal -

District	1872	1881
Bogra	-----	31
Rangpur	-----	6835
Darjeeling	893	1063
Jalpaiguri	40	8760
Cooch Behar	-----	224

(Source : H. H. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol-II, Calcutta, 1891, P. 91.)

Malaria showed its face regularly in the Duars and Terai .But the indigenous people like the Meches ,had succeeded to struggle with malaria. <sup>29</sup> They lived in good health in the atmosphere dominated by malaria. They resided in deep forests for many centuries. They liked the moist weather of the Duars. Their healthiness instead of living in a malaria prone area surprised every one especially the Europeans who were mostly affected by the disease. The Meches were so much inclined with the atmosphere that even the aged people used to sleep always outside under the open sky in all seasons excepting the rainy season.

Some people believed that the Meches were able to survive in a deadly malaria zone because they accumulated their medicines from their own food. By putrefying the rice they prepared their drinking liquor and it was used as preventive against the life taking malaria. Even the labourers who came from Ranchi, Chotanagpur, Santhal Parganas to work in the tea gardens of the Duars gave up their own drink and adopted the said drink invented by the Meches to combat malaria. <sup>30</sup>

They rarely suffered from malaria or cold and cough. Previously the Meches used to sacrifice their lives regularly suffering from "Dhemal-gha". That ulcer first attacked the legs and then spread the whole body, resulted in untimely death. Most people believed that it was a kind of "yaws". Leprosy was also a serious disease among the Meches and many of them suffered from that. Small pox, dysentery, diarrhoea and goiter were common diseases. Cholera did not regularly visit the Mech inhabited areas. There was no trace of venereal diseases also.

It was the belief of the Meches that their ailments broke out due to the activities of supernatural powers. The evil spirits did attack the ailing person. Thus an exorcist was summoned. He was familiar with different names like Roja (Ajaguru), Deusi or Dousi. He treated the patient with herbal medicines and arranged pujas to satisfy the specific spirit causing the disease. A pantole or a Deuri performed as a compounder and assisted the Roja or the Deusi in the above mentioned treatment procedure.

The exorcist initiated the treatment by drawing a circle on the ground representing the deities and kept 13 leaves each representing a spirit with some rice on each. The Ojha placed a pendulum attached to his thumb by a spring to vibrate before the leaves while repeating invocations. The leaf before which the vibration continued, was removed and then asked the god about the sacrifice he liked. He replied through the exorcist. The patient agreed to do that after his recovery. Afterwards the sacrifice was offered to the said god according to their promise.

The Meches believed that from the month of Bysak (from middle of April to the middle of May) the natural calamities began and after that the cattle and human being felt ill. Even epidemics also visited during that period. Thus to save the people and cattle from unknown diseases, epidemics and natural calamities they considered it necessary to worship different deities.

The Meches worshipped the deities like Grajjo also called Kali, Biso Hari and Miinao tacur to expel the diseases . Grajjo caused many problems and illness when she became annoyed. When her anger took a serious form cholera appeared. She was devoted with fowls, goat, curd, chura and plantains. The goddess Biso Hari was placed in a small hut. The hut was set up on east keeping some distance from the house. She also created diseases among the Meches. Sacrifices of duck, fowl, goat, pigeon, curd, chura and plantains were devoted to her for her satisfaction. Minao tacur stayed in the hut built in the northern side, where a small mud plinth was set up for her. She was also given offerings of pig and fowl, jao etc.

Among the Meches when Dhum (cholera) occurred a special puja was performed to appease the anger of kali thakurani (Goddess Kali) . Offerings of pigeon, dahi, chura , goat and plantain were made to her, but not pig or fowl. The Meches believed that goitre (goolando) affected old people more than the young.<sup>31</sup>Its cause was not known .Dropsy was called deinangdong. It was a common disease which affected both young and old. The cause of its outbreak was also unknown. The remedies were (1) harinabis, which was purchased from the Bhutias. Its purity was tested by putting it in some water. If the water was absorbed the medicine was good. (2) Bis-bas-, which was also purchased from the Bhutias. Those medicines were tied with a cord on the sick person's neck or hand. Some people were said to recover by the process. Consumption was known as raj- biadi and it was not common. Jaundice( amai- mundong) was a very common disease.

When a Mech became ill he was called "jobra", meaning unhealthiness. The term "Mudivadang" was also used to denote their ailment. In their diseases the Meches did not use any medicine and they also were unaware of its application. They called the deosi or priest for treatment. After reaching the spot the priest started a religious function. He sat at the head of the patient and said "

If this sick man recovers we will give the Deo a pig. " He then waited for sometime. If he saw that no development was there within three prahar, or three hours , the deosi then said- "If this sick man recovers we will give a goat", or , after the lapse of another prahar "we will give a fowl", and so on. If the patient recovered within the prahar, in which any animal is mentioned, he had to offer that animal after his recovery to the deity to satisfy him.

The deosi also prescribed many bitter vegetables, which were eaten by the patient and also rubbed over his body. The patient generally recovered. Spleen enlargement was called pelai by Meches as well as Garos. No medicine was known. Fever was called lumjadung. Dysentery was called thoi-kina-jadung.

The Meches liked music very much. They had various kind of musical instruments. The kham or a big drum was an essential musical instrument of every Mech house. Because they believed that caused illness and disaster. Skin diseases were common among the Meches. The most prevalent was white leprosy , which was called "dharma chata" , and the more advanced form which was called "khuria biadh". People who suffered from "dharma chata" were not outcasted. Meches used to eat from their hands and dined with them. Those who suffered from "khuria biadh" were also not outcasted. The cause of the disease was not known, nor was it considered to be hereditary.

The Rava was an important tribe of North Bengal residing in Cooch Behar , Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts. When a Rava child became ill due to fever , they worshipped the deity "Longu". They also believed in the soul of their ancestors like "Dekal", "Joura-kal", super natural power "Lyas bai, Bulua, Kanch-pania" etc and worshipped them to please them. They called an ojha or gunin in case of illness. Because they believed that an evil spirit took shelter into the body of an ailing person. The ojha assembled the young dheki plants into one broom and used to beat the ill with that broom by uttering mystic words or mantras. <sup>32</sup>

The Ravas mainly considered three dangerous deities responsible for the diseases of the children. They were Michicbai, Nurbai and Joka - Jukini. Probably Michicbai was a female deity. The Ravas were very much afraid of the deity because its main target was the new born baby. Immediately after the birth of a baby the deity entered into it . That a new born baby was influenced by the deity was evident from the changing colour of the baby. The baby used to become red, yellow, blackish or white. They called the huji (priest) as soon as possible to detect the cause of disease and dedicated duck for Michicbai. <sup>33</sup>

“Nurbai” was also a destructive deity of the Ravas. <sup>34</sup> The meaning of “Nurbai” was the deity of the thatched roof of a house where he also existed. Its activity was to constantly erode the babies. Their main target were the babies from 0 - 8/10 months old. “Nurbai” affected baby used to cry constantly without any reason and some times their eyes also turned over. Then without any late the kaviraj or huji was called and chicken and polau were sacrificed before him. After that all the ingredients of puja were kept on the roof as it was the place where Nurbai stayed.

“Joka - Jukini” was another evil spirit or sub-deity of the Ravas. He was not so much dangerous like Michicbai or Nurbai. Mostly babies from four or five months to eight- ten years old were attacked by Joka- Jukini. As a consequence the babies suffered from fever, cold and cough, dysentery, vomiting etc. The deity was satisfied with naru made of muri or chira. After the worship of the deity Kamaksha the Ravas floated pigeon or other ingredients of the puja with the belief that all the diseases and danger of the village would be driven with them.<sup>35</sup>

The Tamang was an important tribe of North Bengal mainly residing in the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri Duars and Darjeeling. <sup>36</sup> They performed different pujas to wash out diseases. In the month of Chaitra (March) they worshipped

mother Sansari to save themselves from the epidemic diseases. <sup>37</sup> In that occasion pigeons were thrown in to the sky. They believed that the pigeon could make vanish diseases with itself. The puja of Sansari mother did not happen in the homestead. It was generally performed in the river or in some sacred place. During the puja hen or goat was sacrificed. The Tamangs celebrated the Lochar ceremony to welcome the new year. They hoisted flags in their houses with the belief that ghost, demon and disease would flee from the whole village.

Lepcha, a Mongolian tribe principally settled in Darjeeling. A large number of Lepcha people were exorcists (bijuas). They used to eradicate diseases by removing the influence of the evil spirits and worshipping the deities. They were respected by the common people and acquired prestigious status in society. <sup>38</sup>

Another hill tribe, Limbu, also had great faith on the exorcist who was also familiar with the name of Bijua. They were completely ignorant of education. They used to tour different areas when they were summoned by the people during their illness. The exorcist recited several mystic words during worship. They also sang and danced to wash out the diseases. They wore a purple robe and wide hat. They had reputable position in society. <sup>39</sup>

The Dhimals inhabited in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri districts. They believed that the deities also had fixed time for their diet, rest and daily morning duties of personal washing etc. like human being. If any person went at that time the deities became furious and men were attacked by disease. But during untimely puja in house, the deities did not become angry and thus disease could not become serious.<sup>40</sup> They did Pachima Paka Puja for defending themselves from various diseases. As purohitas or priests of the Hindus the Dhamis of the Dhimals did not only worship, they had to be also efficient as ojhas. In disease though the dhami used the vegetable drugs for preparing drugs, the treatment

was mainly depended on puja and mantra and incantations. Their belief was that disease generally appeared due to two reasons- either for super natural power or due to poison or adulteration of food. <sup>41</sup>

In North Bengal the Malpaharias were scattered in Malda and Jalpaiguri districts. They were mainly affected by diseases like gastric ulcer, leprosy, T.B, asthma, tetanus etc. They had aversion for taking hospital treatment. Thus they were carrying some diseases like leprosy from generation to generation. They were of the opinion that their diseases occurred due to some natural, super natural or man made reasons. The natural causes like unhealthy environment, indiscipline, transgression, malnutrition were the reasons for the occurrence of fever, cold and cough, dysentery, gastritis, acid. In those diseases they mainly depended on vegetable drugs and exorcism .The Malpaharias believed that tetanus, diarrhoea burst forth for the occult methods .The serious diseases like T.B, leprosy, asthma, gastric ulcer were the results of their sins of past life. As those diseases were created by the ghosts they worshipped them to remove the diseases. Atap rice, two eggs, sidur, and dhupkathi (resin stick) were the ingredients of the puja. Hens, sheeps, goats or pigs were sacrificed to satisfy the ghosts. <sup>42</sup>

Among the different puja or worship of the Malpaharis the “Gao Puja” was significant. In any day of the Bengali month of Falgun this puja used to occur. In a same holy place or than many deities like Bura Thakur (Ganesh), Kali, Masan Thakur, Sarkari Deo, Shikari Banashakti, Kalashur, Baghasur etc were collectively worshipped. In the Gao Puja the Malpaharis had no idol. The “Dehebi” or the priest used to do the Gao Puja to prevent the entry of disease, unhealthiness and misfortune into the Malpahari villages.

In the tea plantations of North Bengal the various tribes coming from Bihar and Orissa settled themselves. They were the Oraons, Mundas , Baraiks, Mahalis, Naiks, Kharias , Santhals, Raj Gonds, Bhoktas, Nagesias , Kharwars,

Bhujnhars, Sonar , Birgias , Jhoras, Nagabansis etc. Those tribes had evolved different cultures with their traditional health care system.

The Oraons belonged to a Dravidian farmer class. The Oraons believed that their misfortunes or unhealthiness broke out due to some goblins or ghouls who were dissatisfied with them. Thus the Oraons arranged prayer and worshipping to satisfy the evil spirits. Nature spirits, dead ancestor spirits beneficent and maleficent were sincerely worshipped by the Oraons. Their firm belief was that the deity Pat or Pat Raja saved themselves from ailments.

At the time of initiation of a disease they called the ojha or medicine man to find the reason of a disease. He also gave relief to the ailing person. The ojha was also known as Mati or Deonar who used divination and also neutralized evil eye. Evil eye , evil touch and evil mouth were very much recognized by the ojhas . Any Oraon could become a Bhagat or Soka. Women themselves helped their neighbours as mid-wives. They believed that chordewan spirit might do harm to the mother and to avoid this spirit they had to keep a fire burning all the time.

Generally Nasan Bongas and some other evil spirits were believed by the Mundas to bring diseases. Skin diseases were believed to be caused by Nageras. Madness occurred due to one's own spirit. Cholera and diarrhoea were caused by Rog-Bonga or Deb-imai. Usually the Mundas identified the deity responsible for diseases by dropping oil into a vessel of water.

The Nagesias believed in supreme supernatural being. They also commonly believed in two other malevolent supernatural beings whom they called Churil and Muan. Churil led her to death. Those evil spirits were appeared by a dewair only in individual case of sickness. But when a large number of people were suffering from any form of mischief of any of those evil spirits , they worshipped them to protect the people by driving away the evil spirit.

North Bengal was extensively rich with its collection of numerous herbs and it had an ancient system of indigenous treatment practiced by the medicine men and herbalists. Those herbal medication practices still exist today connected with many superstitious practices for the treatment of diseases. The value of the medicinal herbs and the method of treatment used by the people did not differ much from those mentioned in the Ayurvedic, the Unani, the Allopathic and the Homeopathic literature.

The indigenous people of North Bengal used a great variety of medicinal plants and herbs for eradicating various diseases. The Rajbanshis of Terai, including the Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district also used many herbs to cure their ailments. As for example, for burns crushed boiled potatoes was applied on the burnt limb. Hemkantsa (*Bryophyllum* - Pathorkuchi) leaves were crushed and applied. For coughs and colds turmeric was tied in a piece of cloth and allowed to hang round the neck with a string. The child's mother would not eat rice at night. For headache, a green plantain was cut into small pieces crushed with lime, honey and salt pasted on the forehead. For abdominal pain the tuber of a particular grass (kenna ghas) was crushed and some juice was extracted. It was mixed with ginger and salt and taken by mouth warm. As a treatment of diarrhoea a kind of small plantain containing many seeds was roasted, crushed in water and taken by mouth with a little salt. Ulcer and wounds were treated with "Kesari Ghas" and "Bhomva Cita" boiled together in mustered oil and applied. In the case of a big ulcer a little green area was crushed and mixed with the boiling oil. Snake bite was treated with Dhulphi leaves juice of which was poured into the nostrils.<sup>43</sup> Apart from the use of medicinal herbs, magical rites were performed and various charms applied to cure diseases.

But it can also be assumed that as the different tribal medicine men collected the medicinal plants from the forests, the passing of several forest acts by the British Government posed a restriction on that very activity of the medical

practitioners. Thus the forest acts and deforestation activities were pernicious for the health of the indigenous people of rural North Bengal. <sup>44</sup>

Thus the folk medicine or healthcare system of the indigenous people of North Bengal was a primitive, closed and unwritten medical system. Its main theory was based on natural and super natural ideas. It had not always connection with science and reasoning. This medicinal system had a close connection with the tradition, culture, believes and practices of the aboriginals of the soil and it was going on from the antiquity based on generation to generation tradition .

In villages of North Bengal people of different profession like voids, purohitas, ojhas, astrologers, fakirs, pirs performed the functions of the medical practitioners. In village society the influence of religion was immense. Religion also entered into the treatment sector. Goddess Sitala, Kali, Manasha, Dharmathakur, Chandi, Durga, Shiva, Sanithakur, Olabibi, Satyapir, Tistaburi etc were the deities who on the one hand brought wellbeing of the people , on the otherhand could injure people when they got angry and disappointed. Thus to satisfy the deities causing harm , daily, monthly, annual worship of the deities was an acquainted picture of the villages of North Bengal. They were also complied with offerings, sacrifices, oblation. After the prayer of the deities the flowers, amulets were used by the people as preventive and remedial measure for diseases.

In Cooch Behar state there were two main sects among the Hindus, viz, the Vaishnavas and the Saktas. Among the Saktas the Assam Brahmanas almost monopolized the priestly class of the district before the migration of the East Bengal people into this district after 1951. They were called bhawariyas who were fortune tellers. They were generally called for removing diseases and or other calamities in order to obtain preventable medicine from the gods. When patients went to visit them for treatment, they repaired to a pat or raised mound and

there shook their head as if in a state in which the soul seemed to be absent from the body. It was done with the accompaniment of a drum. Soon a revelation or directive was obtained from the god who was thought to have been angered. The angry god was then propitiated by a puja with some profit for the bhawriya.

The Ayurvedic system of medicine was very much popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. According to the Census Report of 1872 in Bengal there were 3769 educated doctors, whereas the number of kabirajas, govaidyas and hakeems exceeded 24000. But the hakeems were less in number. The Brahmins and the vaidyas predominated the ayurved treatment sector. According to the prevalent Hindu tradition the medical system was the monopoly of the vaidyas. The fact also became clear from the statistics of the existence of the vaidyas of North Bengal from 1872 to 1881. <sup>45</sup>

District	1872	-----	1881
1. Dinajpur ---	585	-----	685
2. Jalpaiguri ---	42	-----	201
3. Malda ---	403	-----	6
4. Darjeeling ---	10	-----	

( Source: H.H Risley- " The People of India", Reprint, 1991, Calcutta)

Apart from individual effort the rajas, zamindars and different voluntary organizations took initiative to popularize ayurvedic medical system. For the prosperity and publicity of ayurvedic system they had taken different positive steps like - to distribute free ayurvedic medicine, introduce free ayurvedic medical education for the students, arrange essay competition on health care according to ayurvedic system and publish different journals related to ayurved.

The ayurvedic physicians or kavirajas possessed valuable knowledge of indigenous medicine. Shuk Chand Baidya of Baneswar in Cooch Behar state was very much efficient medicinal practitioner and showed his excellence in some wonderful cures in cases of carbuncles, ulcers, etc. He had imparted some of his knowledge at least to the state kaviraj, who had been able to cure some cases. The Maharaja of Cooch Behar intended to grant some land to Shukchand in recognition of his special knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

As Cooch Behar was a princely state its medical system was well developed. The Ayurvedic Charitable Dispensary run by the state was very much popular among the local inhabitants. The local people used to visit the dispensary spontaneously and the attendance of patients there was increasing day by day. Approximately 41-50% persons used to attend the dispensary regularly.<sup>47</sup>

Kaviraj Biraja Charan Gupta was a notable ayurvedic practitioner of Bengal. While he was in the service of Cooch Behar state, compiled the book called the "Banausodhi Darpan". The Maharaja bore the total expenditure required for the printing of the book, as it was considered to be a very valuable work on native medicine. It was an Ayurvedic Materia Medica with quotations and copious original Sanskrit perceptions from standard works. The suggestions of efficient British medical practitioners on different medical drugs had also been prescribed. The famous Ayurvedic practitioner Mahamahopadhyaya Bijayaratna Sen Kabirajan had written the introduction of the book.

After Kaviraj Biraja Charan Gupta Kabisudhan resigned his post in 1909, kaviraj Srish Ch. Sen Kabisudhan served the post of the Cooch Behar state ayurvedic practitioner. Besides the ordinary medicines he distributed medicated oils prepared by himself. It fostered the popularity of the State Ayurvedic Dispensary. The king of Cooch Behar appointed a permanent compounder to

assist the kaviraj. <sup>48</sup> He became very popular among the residents of Cooch Behar.

Kaviraj Kamini Kumar Bhattacharya, Paritosh Bhattacharya were the renowned ayurvedic practitioners who used to attend the kings of Cooch Behar. Kaviraj Srish ch. Sen, Jyotish ch. Sen, Srijut Rabi ch. Karjee, Kishori Mohan Roy Goswami, Tarun Krishna Bhattacharya, Satyabrata Bhattacharya were the other popular ayurvedic practitioners of Cooch Behar. They treated patients suffering from diseases like gout, ulcers, dysentery, carbuncles and other skin diseases in the Ayurvedic Dharitable dispensary according to the indigenous method of treatment.<sup>49</sup>

A ground for the Ayurvedic medical garden was being laid out and steps had been taken to grow shrubs and medical plants there. Later on some of the herbs and shrubs like anantamul, sonachal etc grew there and some trees like peepal, amla, bohera, ashoka were being used in the preparation of medicines. The kavirajas utilized the ayurvedic medical garden or kaviraj bagan for the collection of the raw materials for their medicines. They also used to buy medicines from ayurvedic shops like Sadhana Ausadhalaya. <sup>50</sup>

In the year 1940, in Jalpaiguri district Sitanath Pramanik, the eminent kaviraj had shown excellent performance in the treatment of small pox. Thus the municipality of Jalpaiguri had given him rupees 150 in two phases as his reward, where as the other kavirajas were given rupees twenty five as their allowances. <sup>51</sup> In Alipurduar kavirajas bought some medicines from Gouri Amar Ausadhalaya established in 1937. <sup>52</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the large areas of North Bengal were devastated by malaria. In order to struggle with the disease, experiments were made on cinchona bark by the British and quinine proved to be a panacea for malaria. But the quinine left a negative impact on the growth and prosperity of indigenous

medicine. To compete with the quinine, the ayurvedic physicians prescribed that nata fruit, gulancha and vat plants would be effective as anti-malarial medicines.<sup>53</sup>

In Raiganj of Dinajpur district there were some eminent ayurvedic practitioners like Rohini Mohan Nag, Rasik Kabiraj (Thana Road), Biren Bhattacharya Kabiraj (North Birnagar), Girija Chakrabarty (South Birnagar), Panchanan Chakrabarty (Kanchan Pally). Bidhu Kabiraj passed from the Pabna Astanga Ayurved College and practiced in Subhasganj.<sup>54</sup>In South Dinajpur Dinanath Chowdhury was a famous ayurvedic practitioner.

Rangpur district was ravaged by the famine of 1943. It was followed by a sore called "Naga Gha", cholera and small pox. At that crucial moment Sita Kabiraj of Laxmitary village of Rangpur formed a medical squad to face the attack of small pox.<sup>55</sup>

The ayurvedic physicians also published journals to aware people about the benefits of ayurvedic medicine. In the year 1889 Dr. Binod Bihari Roy edited a monthly journal named "Chikitsak" which was published from Taland of Rajshahi. Its aim was to grow consciousness among the ayurvedic physicians and western medicinal practitioners also about the positive effects of ayurvedic medical system and they would spread the knowledge among the poor mass.<sup>56</sup>

From Malda to Cooch Behar, the one-fourth part of the total population of North Bengal was Muslim. The remaining majority population were converted Muslims. By far the majority of the Muslims were the Sheks, or as they popularly called Nasyas. The Mauta Bajikars were the nomadic people among the Muslims. Apart from showing different games of snake and bear, they also used to sale vegetable drugs, animals and charm. Females also sold drugs roaming in villages.<sup>57</sup>

In the then Muslim society the physicians with supernatural powers were mostly respected. Because they quickly recovered the patients with magic or sorcery. Later the Muslims started to recognize Satyapir, Kalurai, Kalugaji, GajDakshinrai, Olabibi, Bonbibi, Masandali etc deities as their saviours from various diseases. In treatment sector also the demand of the pir, gaji, roja, fakir, muskil ashan, ojha was gradually increasing instead of the unani practitioners or hakims. The patients used to assemble in mosques, darga or pir's majar instead of going into hospitals. <sup>58</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century North Bengal though unani medicine was not popular like Ayurved, but its master-pupil tradition from generation to generation was undeterred. In Malda the "Unani Ousadhalay "set up by Hakim Abid Ali Kha was very much popular. <sup>59</sup> The Muslims established in Bengal many khanquahs or monasteries. There were langarkhanas also with many khanquahs. Their khanquahs were of great benefit to the people and served many useful purposes. It was also a hospital where the sick and the old could find shelter and were treated. In some tea gardens where the Muslim labourers were in good numbers , unani medicine became popular there. In the haats (local rural markets) adjacent to that gardens unani medicines were sold to serve the medical needs of the Muslim labourers. <sup>60</sup>

But the popularity of unani system of medicine was reducing hastily in comparison to ayurvedic system of medicine. In North Bengal the number of unani practitioners were very few. During the Muslim rule the unani system of medicine of Bengal reached to the peak, but under British rule it lost its popularity and started to fade away from the medicinal system of North Bengal. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the revival of ayurved several steps were taken. But in case of unani no such initiative was seen.

With the initiation of the allopathic system in the very golden days of colonial rule the ayurvedic system lost its past glory. But due to the chief price of

the ayurvedic drugs in comparison to the high cost of the allopathic medicines and also the vital need to introduce European medicines into the rural areas through the kavirajas and hakeems prevented the state from taking a unbending step against the indigenous system. In fact , there were enthusiastic attempts on the part of the government to appoint the kavirajas and hakeems of the rural areas in the health service and encourage them to popularize western medicine with the help of indigenous drugs. Thus ayurveda survived without the support and aid of the British Government. However the existence and survival of the kavirajas was possible not only due to the fact that the colonial Government wanted them to stay alive, but because the kavirajas were utilized as a “necessary link” in the spread and popularization of European medicine in the Indian market.

But it can not be denied that the patronage of the British government to western medicine undoubtedly paved the way for the decline of indigenous medicine. On the other hand, the old practitioners of Ayurveda did not record the fruits of their medical and surgical experiments. Their knowledge died with them. This was true of kaviraj Haran Chandra Mukhopadhaya of Rajshahi, who did not teach his students and so his knowledge of ayurveda also disappeared after his demise.<sup>61</sup>

The ayurvedic medical system attempted to revive itself by the reprinting of the translated versions of the ancient treatises on medicine and surgery and partly by putting forward arguments for indigenous drugs against European medicine. The ayurvedic medical practitioners believed that allopathic medicines were suitable for cold regions like Europe and unsuitable for warm climatic zones like India. Thus they were of the opinion that people should take medicines made of those plants and herbs which were suitable for the country in which they were brought up. It was also argued that allopathic drugs brought immediate relief but showed its faces frequently. The ayurvedic medicines, on the other hand, went to the root cause of a disease so it took a longer time but

resulted in total relief and cure. The indigenous medicines were available at moderate price, because the raw materials or plants and herbs for curing the diseases could be collected from the natural neighbourhood. It was also argued that ayurveda succeeded where allopathy could not go further. There were other traditional forms of medicine which developed out of people's needs and mastery over nature and which did not fall strictly within the scope of ayurveda.

Ayurveda had its base in the countryside, in the tols and gurukuls where the students learnt the art from their masters and gained some practical knowledge and experience when they went along with their masters to the houses of the patients. However in the wake of urbanization, many kavirajas shifted to big towns and got a foot hold among the urban people. On the other hand European medicine was basically an urban phenomenon, despite attempts made by the government to spread allopathy to the rural areas through the ayurvedic practitioners.

It should be noted that while ayurveda had its roots in the villages, it depended for its survival and growth also on the rajas, princes, zamindars and other feudal lords. Many of the kaviraji practitioners were employed as their family physicians and amassed considerable fortunes. The medical science received patronage from the Koch kings of the native state of Cooch Behar. The royal physician was called Vaidya. The royal cook, called Supkar, might have a proper knowledge of medicine.<sup>62</sup> The Darrang Raj Vamsavali mentioned that he knew the causes and remedies of diseases like bat (gout). There was also a professional class of medical men called Bej who treated diseases with medicinal herbs and incantations. It was therefore, among them that ayurvedic treatment was cultured. The "Gurucharitas" contained reference to a kind of medical oil called Mahanarayan tel prepared by some villagers who definitely had some knowledge of ayurveda.<sup>63</sup>

To compete with the western medicine numerous ayurvedic medicine concerns came into being. The prominent drug companies were C.K. Sen & Co, S. K. Burman (Dabur) & Co, Sadhana Aushadhalaya and Dacca Ayurvediya Pharmacy Ltd etc. <sup>64</sup> Kaviraj Mrityunjay Haldar of Kotwali, Malda, produced Swadeshi quinine for the treatment of malaria patients. It was prepared through chemical process from indigenous plants and that was in no way inferior to foreign quinine. It was displayed at the exhibitions held at Malda and Murshidabad and highly appreciated for its intrinsic merit. <sup>65</sup>

In North Bengal the Homeopathic system of medicine also prospered among the people simultaneously with the western system of medicine. But it appeared afterwards. The homeopath doctors who contributed largely for the growth and development of homeopathy medicine in Jalpaiguri district were Dr. Mukunda Das, Dr. Satish Dsagupta, Dr. Naren Das, Dr. Arun Dasgupta, Dr. Brahmopada Dasgupta, Dr. Hemchandra Mazumder. <sup>66</sup> In Cooch Behar Dr. A.C.Roy, Promod Das, Nripen ch. Das, Kanak Sarkar were the notable homeopaths.<sup>67</sup> In South Dinajpur Dinanath Chaudhury was a famous ayurvedic practitioner. <sup>68</sup> In 1968 at Rangpur a Homeopathic Medical College and Hospital was established by Dr. Ismail Kha. The Diploma in Homeopathy Medicine and Surgery (DHMS) of four years' duration was introduced in the college. The students who used to get the diploma from the college began their practice to cater the medical needs of the people of Rangpur. <sup>69</sup>

In the foothills of the Himalaya the Tibetan system of medicine was prevalent. According to the system all diseases occurred due to lust , anger and ignorance. The first was caused by wind, the second was caused due to bile and the last due to phlegm. The accessory causes of disease were season ( cold and heat), evil spirit, wrong use of food and ill conduct of life. They also believed that skin, the flesh, veins, bones, viscera and the bowels were generally attacked by several diseases. Diseases caused by wind arose mainly in the summer before the dawn. The diseases caused by bile occurred in autumn about midday and

midnight. Phlegm prevailed during the morning and evening of the spring season.<sup>70</sup>

As the Tibetans used to believe that diseases occurred due to evil spirits also, they used different kind of amulet-charms to drive out those spirits. To remove the diseases they also chewed a special paper in which magic sentences containing certain letters ( za-zig or eatable letters) of old Devnagari script were written. Most of the believers in Tibetan system of medicine wore "charms folded up into tiny cloth -covered packets tied around with coloured threads as geometrical design as pendants in the neck". There was a general form of charm called the "The Assembly of the hearts of the Lamas", used to struggle against accident, disease and ill-fortune .<sup>71</sup> There were also separate charms for different diseases <sup>72</sup>like leprosy, cholera, small pox, fever, plague etc.<sup>73</sup>The Tibetans also considered several diseases responsible for various diseases. The demons were familiar with the name of "gshed". The lamas worshipped the demons and great oblations were offered.<sup>74</sup>

Among the western, ayurvedic, unani, homeopathic systems of medicine , apart from ayurvedic all were alien in Indian soil. The Government patronized the western system of medicine to a large extent and also backed the unani medicine. But the homeopathic medicine was deprived of getting government aid and support. Afterwards in the long run the ayurvedic and homeopathic system of medicine have increased their popularity and accessibility among the poor people of both urban and village areas. The urban people were benefited by the western system of medicine. But the rural mass was deprived of getting the benefit of it. Thus the gap was fulfilled by the ayurvedic and homeopathic medical system.

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