

**CHAPTER VI**  
**RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED**  
**WITH INDIGINOUS HEALTH CARE**

## Religious and Beliefs Related to Health Care System

Purulia, Bankura and West Medinipur are reckoned as Jungle Muhal for their geographical setting and sharing a common history from colonial period. Common habitations of diverse range of population come from different corners of country make a more or less synchronized socio cultural life. In quest for solution the health care people practice some common religious practices in spite of their varied religious practices. In Jungle Muhal, *dharma thakur* is responsible to healing processes against many malevolent entities formed and live in the Jungle Muhal. People especially Bankura and West Medinipur appease *dharma thakur* during different type of ailments. They make vow, worship regularly and pray for boon of *dharma thakur*. The worshipper of Dharma thakur is called *doari*. They usually look after the patient in the name of *dharma thakur*, they use *mantra* (spell) to cure the patients, and besides this they prescribe folk medicine like herbs and other domestic material as medicine. The self appointed doctors and *gunin* have been working to cure the snake bite patient till today. They are generally called *kabiraj*, *baddi*, *hakim*, *ojha*, *gunin*, *jotish*, *upashak* etc. and *sadhu* in urban areas of West Bengal.

Goddess *manasa* plays a crucial role in healing culture of Purulia district. Majority of the households practising curative performances to patients appease goddess *manasa* regularly. In many households the earthen idol of *manasa* are present. They bring the idol for worshipping in the middle of August from market or potter and keep the idol for the whole year. After bringing the new idol they immerse the old idol in pond. Everyday in the morning and evening they worship the deity. People of Purulia want the boon of *manasa* for each and every solution for their health problems. Making vow and repay the vow in alter of deity is a common phenomenon among the men healers and patients of Purulia. The gatherings of cured patients along with their family members carry the glory of the men healers and supernatural power of the goddess *manasa*. Some men healers prescribe a particular routine of obeying the deities during medication of different ailments. In many older villages there are temples for goddess *manasa* attached with the families of priests. These families are also empowered to practice the healing culture.

Many men healers especially the woman healers claim that they have been taught some divine medicine by goddess *manasa* and start the healing practices for the purpose of

human welfare. It provides mental strength and confidence of patients. These influences bring the psycho somatic affect upon patients' body to be cured of diseases.

Deity *chandi* is also important in the healing culture of Jungle Muhal. She is helpful in severe digestive disorder, cholera and other enteric diseases. Worshipping of deity *chandi* was a common phenomenon at earlier days but it is gradually decreasing due to unavailability of priests and temples in this area.

Worshipping of goddess *sitala* is very important in case of attack by various types of poxes and skin problems. In general the priests of goddess *sitala* treat patients of small pox and related problems. People worship her during the breakout of this health problem in villages. The priests are also equipped with herbal knowledge required for treatment.

The religious affiliations of different types of regional and marginal deities are applied as ingredients of *kabaj*, *daga*, *tabij*, ring, *maduli*, and *tika*. The patients of indigenous treatment system have strong faith upon these devices and follow the prescribed usages in course of curing from the health problems. Sometimes these devices are used as preventive against the attacks of malevolent supernatural entities. People wear these devices on auspicious day chanting mantra invoking the name of the affiliated goddess or deity.

Many health problems are not reckoned properly by the people of this area and make their own etiology with relation to the affect of different supernatural entities. Many health problems like *bhut laga*, *daini khawa*, *hawa laga*, *Ban mara*, *najar Laga* and so on are associated with malevolent spirits who mainly the women and children. In such cases, *jharfuk*, *dhuna pora*, *jal pora*, *nun pora* etc. are applied for curing the patients.

These methods are also applied to cure snake bite patients till today. If the patient is recovered from illness through this process, the people have to follow varieties rituals like *brata palan* and other ways to get relief.

People remain alert as they think malevolent forces are loitering everywhere in the way of their daily activities. To keep their child healthy and free from disease the women of Jungle Muhal usually keep their hair untied, do not dip in the water, do not use vermilion, they do not take varieties of food and follow some prohibition provided by elders as well as they observe rituals during *pujima*, *amabassya*, *ekadashi*, saturday, tuesday, solar eclipse and

lunar eclipse. These are not enough; fasting women follow *dandi kata* on the yard of temple and long stay in the temple premises. Some keep vows to fulfill their desire and procurement of disease.

The religion and faith affiliated socio cultural phenomenon exist in regular life of people. Interrelationships with health problems and religious beliefs have also an age old interactions. These are observed not only in the family or village but also the people travel a long distance to particular region or places to get the boon for curing the health problems. Many temples or regional pilgrimage places are also popular by their affectivities in curing health problems. Ashramic tradition, worshipping places of renowned saints, *Jogi, sadhu* are also popular for their curing ability.

The popular temples and *ashrams* are important to the people of Jungle Muhal. Among the famous temple of Jungle Muhal *Kalithan* (shrine of goddess *kali*) of *tara indkuri* of Purulia District, *shivthan* (shrine of Lord Shiva) of Manbhagra, *ekteshwar dham* of Bankura, *ambikathan* of Ambikanagar, *sadhu ashram* of Sagen, *durgathan* of Sadhu Saltora, *chinnamasta* of Bishnupur, *sadhu ashram* (Chirarbandh) of Bamni Village, *hatikheda* of Ajodhya, Anara, *bhairabthan* of Gopalpur, *shivthan* of Budhpur, and so on.

Some health problems occur due to slight deviation of normal health and human body has the capacity to return to normal state with out any extra care for that. Doctors and elders do not apply any medicine. These problems are interpreted as the will of supernatural power. People withstand a minor change of his / her behavior like uttering the name of goddess, light exercise, vomiting by children after drinking milk, minor headache, feeling hot in any area of skin, light shivering, temporary irritation in eyes, nose or skin are examples of this type of health problems. People have more beliefs in deities or malevolent supernatural entities and interpret these problems according to their own experiences and perceptions. Increasing trouble insists the patients to perceive these phenomena as causes of suspected supernatural forces.

Medications of indigenous health care, especially used by the less experienced healers always do not produce desired result. In such cases people are habituated to blame the influence of supernatural forces in medication. Improper combination of herbal medicine, problems in identification, improper knowledge of herbal plant, wrong processes of

medicine preparation also generate the idea about the influence of supernatural forces in sufferings and curing processes.

### Religious Activities in Association with Treatment System among Men healers

Indigenous treatment system as its origin has a prime orientation of supernatural world of people. In this regards, religion is an important factor to understand facts and processes of indigenous health care system. Causation and curing of many diseases are not explainable in this health care system which leads the ideas and perceptions of religion in association of medication of indigenous treatment system. People belief medicines are the only substances which are effective after the affiliation of religious power. Men healers are basically worshippers of particular deities or Gods. In this concern selection of men healers is also regulated by the worshipping deities of men healers. In sake of worshipping deities of the patients, they feel to attend the men healers under same power. Religious practices of men healers bring a special confidence to the patients. Men healers provide a certain mode of practices of certain rituals and performances along with the medication.

Frequency of involvement of men healers with religious practices through categories like regular worshipping, in only lunar days, auspicious day, in public temples with elements of practice like Medicine, vow and spelling, vows and medicine and others.

**Table-53:** Religious activities in association of treatment by the indigenous men healers

FW	Field	M	MIR	V&M	Total
RWST	NYGM	3	-	14	19 (2*)
	BLMP	-	2	12	14
WZD	NYGM	-	-	3	3
	BLMP	2	3	3	8
WAD	NYGM	2	2	12	16
	BLMP		11	4	15
NW	NYGM	2	-	-	2
	BLMP	-	-	-	-
WPT	NYGM	-	-	-	-
	BLMP	1	-	2	3
Total		10	18	50	80

(2\*belongs to special time treatment)

**ABBVR:** Frquency of Worshipping-FW; Nayagram-NYGM; Balarampur-BLMP; Regular worshipping self temple or than-RWST; Worship in zodiac days –WZD; Worship in auspicious days –WAD; Not worshipping –NW; Worship in public temples –WPT;Medicine-M; Medicine and influence of religion-MIR; Vows and medicine-V&M; Age group and experiences in years

Men healers with strength of below one fifth treat their patients by without using any influence of religious power. Among them five men healers do worshipping at regular basis and engage in a special day. But they do not suggest their patients to follow the line of worshipping. Two men healers apply their religious influences as objects as other than medicine. Almost three fourth of total men healers suggest patients to keep a vow along with a medicine. Men healers not worshipping in their family do not suggest their patients to obey any type worshipping. Twenty five men healers doing their regular and worshipping and suggest patient to make a vow. Only two men healers follow a special time to cater their service. Men healers doing their worshipping in auspicious day have all type suggestion to obey all the type of religious categories to patient.

Two are Christian and follow their own religious code of conduct. Two men healers have less belief in religious activities along with the medication.

Three men healers advise to their patients to go through medication only. Sixteen men healers apply their religious influence upon patients in quest for cure. Eight healers worship their appeased deities in their own than (Alter) or temple. And more than sixteen men healers make their worshipping in some auspicious days. But affect on patients come in differently. All categories of men healers of study area under Purulia district suggest their patient to make a vow along with medication. Religious affiliation with treatment system is more prevalent than Nayagram. Influence of religion act through the expression of devotion by the patients to the deities worshipped by the men healers.

### **Religious Practices of Women Healers**

Women healers have less physically able to collect raw materials, prepare medicine and cater services by travelling distance. In these reason women healers treat few health problems only and in certain period. In case of religious affiliation women healers some time more empowered by supernatural forces in comparison to men. For this reason catering services or skills of women healers is hard to understand to the patients. In this table woman healers are considered through experiences in length of period. Worshipping is an important factor to understand the nature of religious affiliation. Some time women healers worship their family deity; in few cases she worships more than deity. Therefore

worshipping of number of deities is also another factor in exploring the capacity of women healers. Frequency of worshipping by the women healers is also important variables to create some supernatural influence upon the patients mind. In this table this factor is also considered in analysis of data.

**Table-54:** Religious practices of women healers

Exp.	Field	FOW	Number of deities			Total
			1-2	3-4	5 +	
up to 3	NYGM	R	-	1	-	1
		N-R	-	-	-	
	BLMP	R	-	1	-	1
		N-R	-	-	-	
4 to 10	NYGM	R	-	2	-	2
		N-R	-	3	1	4
	BLMP	R	1	-	1	2
		N-R	3	-	-	3
11+	NYGM	R	6	1	2	9
		N-R	2	1	1	4
	BLMP	R	6	2	2	10
		N-R	3	1	-	4
Total			21	12	7	40

**ABBVR:** Experiences-Exp;Nayagram-NYGM; Balarampur-BLMP; Frequency of Worshipping-FOW;

Seventeen women healers are with religious affiliation in course of their treatment with indigenous treatment system. Only three women healers with experience of more than 20 years do not use any affiliation of supernatural power in relation to their treatment. Three women healers worship five and more deities to fetch the supernatural power in treatment their patients. Among them two women healers worship at regular basis in their own alter made in their homestead. Three women healers worship 3 or four deities to get support of supernatural power in their healing. More than ten women healers worship one or two deities to collect their super natural power in connection to healing procedures. Increasing years of experience have a relation to worship a number of deities. More than fourteen of women healers worshipping deities perform their worshipping at regular basis. Only four women healers worship their affiliated deities at periodical basis.

In this region women healers worship the deities like *sitala*, *kali* etc. along with these deities they take *diksha* of *Hari Om*, from Swarupananda, and Ruia Baba sects. They worship some malevolent and benevolent supernatural agencies in connection to their treatment like *dhan kudra*.

Women healers of Purulia region have more than ten years experience, in this reason experience categorization is considered differently in respect to Nayagram region. Religious affiliation among the women healers of Purulia region is greater than women healers of Nayagram region. Thirteen of total women healers of this region worship regularly to their affiliated deities. Only two women healers do not worship in propose of their treatment. Thirteen of total women healers worship one or two deities for their treatment. More experienced women healers are related with more deities in connection to their treatment. Three women healers worship their deities at periodical basis. Special occasion have been must be performed in worshipping of their affiliated deities. Two women worship their affiliated deities in lunar days only.

Not only the affiliation and worshipping of the deities are reflected to activities of women healers but also dress, ornaments, decorating their body with vermilion. Uttering chanting, obey regular rituals by systematic performances are also observe in behaviour of women healers. Patients get some psychological support from the gesture and posture of women healers before taking any medication. Generally women healers are week in skill of uses of medicinal materials in course of treatment.

### **Religious Beliefs, Worshipping Among the Patients During the Period of Sufferings**

Rural people have integrated the interrelation of their body, existing supernatural entities, and nature about their health care phenomenon. Many facts and processes of causation of diseases, results of treatments and role of unknown factors are not clear to them. In this connection they are not satisfied only with the treatment process. Health seeking behaviours including rituals, food habit, sleeping pattern, company of particular persons during suffering period are also prescribed by their society and religion. Religious beliefs, family even personal religious practices become important in health seeking behaviours. Different family members follow their perceived health seeking behaviour, which they think reliable in curing the disease. During treatment of the patients in a family, elderly females make vows, and arrange worshipping of particular deities after consulting religious experts. Sometimes elderly at the position of grandparents and parents memorise the glory of God for getting the blessing on the way to curing the family members. In the following table these are considered as different types of performance in course of health seeking behaviour in relation with the age group of the patients.

**Table-55:** Religious beliefs, worshipping among the patients during the period of sufferings

Age group	Field	V		W		S		A		Total	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
up to 40	NYGM	1	3	-	1	-	1	1	-	2	5
	BLMP	1	1	2	5	-	-	2	-	5	6
41-60	NYGM	1	2	1	2	1	2	3	1	6	7
	BLMP	6	3	7	3	2	-	5	1	20	7
61+	NYGM	5	3	2	3	3	1	3	-	13	7
	BLMP	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	1
Total		14	12	12	14	7	5	14	2	47	33

**ABBVR:** Nayagram-NYGM; Balarampur-BLMP; Male-M; Female-F; Vow-V; Worship-W; Spell-S; Absence of religious matter-A; Age group in years

More than fifteen patients make vows to reliable deities and supernatural agencies. Especially, during suffering of female patients vows are lodged at a greater frequency. More than one fifth family of female patients from all age-groups make arrangement worshipping of appropriate deities either at their household or to nearby temples. In case of patients from both the sexes and more than 60 years age praise and chant the name of deities to seek their blessing. One third of total male patients are abstaining from any type religious performances during their suffering. They also have representatives from all the existing age group. This is an indication of emerging affect of secularization of health care phenomenon among the rural people. Only one female from the age group 51 to 60 years abstain from religious performances during her health problems.

The scenario of religious performances during health problems is more or less same in two study areas. This indicates the importance of religious affiliation to health care phenomenon. Family members of seven males and four females make vow during their suffering. Almost one third of families having male patients make arrangement of worshipping appropriate deities and supernatural agencies at their household in quest for cure of the patients. Patients having more than fifty years of age use to chanting spell to earn blessing of deities in seeking relief from health problems. Seven males remain free from all type of religious performances during health problems. Trend of secularization of health care is also observed here.