8.1. Folk Medicines among the Koches:

The Koches do not easily take to the modern system of treatment to cure diseases. It was more so in the past and it is still true in the case of Koches of the interior villages.

Generally two kinds of therapeutic procedures are initiated depending on the nature of the illness. Simple physical illness is treated by herbal medicines and or mental illness is cured either by performing Puja or by exorcist sense. Herbal folk medicines are undoubtedly as ancient as occult folk medicines and have been widely practiced among the tribes of North-East India.

There may be some occult folk medicines in use among the Koches but an extensive field study is needed to find out such medicines used by the Koches.
(a) The Herbs and Their Use to Cure Diseases (Jabwa Talai-Paan Aro Beram Charangni):

In Koch language, Jabwa means medicines, Talai-Paan means trees and plants i.e. herbs and Beram Charangni means cure of diseases. The following are the names of trees and plants which cure the diseases mentioned against the names of the trees and plants\(^1\).

1. **Cheramora (Nayantara):** This herbal medicine is used to cure Diabetic, Leucorrhoea, Blood Pressure, Loss of Memory and Cancer.

2. **Loorie (Bishlya Karani):** The leaves of the tree are used to cure the pain in any part of human body.

3. **Dufuk-Gan-Hatikani-Paan (Sharpagandha):** For serious Fever, Insomnia, Heart-weak patients are treated with this herb.

4. **Choong-Choong Mai-Paan (Narasingha):** To cure stomach trouble this herbal leaf is commonly used.

\(^1\) Information gathered through Field Study.
5. **Khudaei Masta (Pathar Kuchi):** Urinal problem with Headache and Gallstone suffering patients are given this herb.

6. **Kanchi-fa Paan (Aopa Marga):** The root of this plant is used for Abortion, and to cure Vomiting and Cataract.

7. **Dookchak (Ada i.e. ginger):** This herb is used for different stomach related problems.

8. **Nonthai Paan (Bel i.e. wood apple):** Root of this plant is used in snake biting, leaf used for Excitement and fruit is used in any kind of stomach problem.

9. **Batshyam Loorie (Sweta Pushpa):** The root of this plant is used for Abortion, Body-pain etc. The soup prepared by the bark of this tree is used to cure Breath trouble, Fever, etc.

10. **Param Thai (Amlakhi):** The fruit of this plant is used to cure Diabetic and other diseases related to stomach.

11. **Doobla Talay (Duwori bon):** This is a kind of grass which is used to stop bleeding, itches, etc.
12. **Shajan Paan (Sajina):** The leaves of this plant are used in Gastric, High Blood Pressure and to regain the Sense of Senseless persons.

13. **Miya-Michik Paan (Moona-mooni):** The leaves of this plant always move like a pendulum and it helps to grow deep love between husband and wife.

14. **Lajura Paan (Lajja Pati):** This herb is used to cure tooth pain, piles, bed smell of body, to grow deep love between lover and beloved, etc.

15. **Tulsi:** This herb is very popular among all the village communities. Tulsi leaf is used to relieve cough, fever, infection in eyes, etc.

16. **Mashu Thelay Paan (Kishlaya):** This herbal plant is used to cure wounds and septic, etc.

(b) **Exorcist Therapy:**

If an Ojha has diagnosed the illness as caused by spirits
angered or by neglect, the patient is advised to make offering to the obtain spirit\textsuperscript{2}. The offering may be made for the patient by the Ojha. The spirit appeared by the offering will remove the illness. Sometimes by performing Pujas, a few serious illnesses are cured. The Pujas performed to please the spirits and cure illness are (a) Halepa, (b) Hudom Woay, (c) Nagini Woay, (d) Tala Woay, (e) Petni Woay, (f) Moila Woay, (g) Kalopichashe, (h) Buri Woay, (i) Nokhura or Chal Woay. Besides these Pujas, the Ojha of the community performs some spirit rites behind the boundary of the village to control famines.

\textsuperscript{2} Informant: Sri Nagen Koch, February, 2004.
8.2. Folk Medicine and the Society in the Rural Background:

The Koches especially, the non-converts do not easily take to the modern systems of treatment to cure diseases. It was more so in the past, and it is still true in the case of the Koches of the interior hills. It is known that many Christian Missionaries had to coax the hill people to take modern, chiefly allopathic treatments. They gave to these backward people free medical treatments and did other humanitarian works amongst them, this won cover to the foreign faith many rather a large number of persons. But even now there are persons who believe the allopathic medicines to be things of the foreigners and thus they dislike them.

The Koches believe that the ailments come to people because of the devils wrath upon them and cure lies in propitiation of the devil and invocation of aids of the God. The rites performed to scare away the devil from person of the ailing one after invocation of the mercy of the God are known by the term Atela, pronounce as athela. Nobody has ever seen
the devil or spirit and ghost and God but the priest performing rites for the person ailing utters words like *Karkami, chumime, dakgipa* and *rabuga* etc. when member of a family falls ill and does not come round even after a long time after using of indigenous herbal drugs the family then prepares to worship the Gods, so that they may be pleased and with the aids of them the devil may be dispelled to cure the member from his ailments. To do this, the family invites the wisest men of the locality. The wise man is known as Kamal. The procedure is under gone during the morning time generally and is instituted outside the house of the sick. During the worship the patient to remain with the Kamal. Outside the house of the patient a place is neatly cleared and a Bedi (a small elevation of earth) is constructed there. Four banana trees (small) are planted around the bedi, one tree in each of the corners of the bedi; sometimes four small bamboo posts are also planted inside of banana trees. The entire place reserved for the purpose of such occasion is known as *Kiminda*. On the bedi and within the four banana trees or bamboo posts, a flat and round bamboo basket of the average size (commonly known as Kula
i.e., winnowing fan) is placed on a banana leaf. The soul of the patient is sitting besides the priest during the time of worship. He (the priest) prays God and invokes the aid of all the Gods to deliver the patient from the diseases from which he or she suffers. The priest then gets a fowl, holds it before the patient, blows air from his mouths towards him or her wishing well of him or her and then sacrifices the fowl dissecting it by the neck. He puts marks of blood of the sacrificed fowl in the four banana trees or the bamboo posts around the bedi. The entrails of the fowls are then taken out by opening its inside and the banana trees or the posts are touched with them. During the time of worship priest also gives a dance performance and after him other follow in turn. The priest stays in the whole day in the house of the patients. At the end of the procedure the priest leaves for his home. Two or three persons would carry with them some boiled rice, curry and meat for the family members of the priest. To gourd pots of liquor are also given to the priest to take to his home. This lengthy and costly procedure is adopted to cure diseases of persons only when the diseases are of serious nature.