

Rehet ran murgan: The traditional herbal lore of Santals of Dumka District, Santal Pargana, Jharkhand

Prabhawati Bodra
Assistance professor
University Department of Botany
Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Dumka, Jharkhand India

ABSTRACT:

The paper reveals a unique and somewhat concealed herbal medication system prevalent among santals of Dumka district known as rehat ran Murugan i.e medication by roots. The herbal healers who practice and describe the ancient medication method are addressed as raranko i.e medicine man. The value of wisdom is acquired by them through their ancestors by word of mouth. As inherited knowledge is transferred to the next generation only verbally, proper documentation is very scarce. A systematic and scientific approach was conducted for 18 months to explore and document the ancient art to its level best. 32 plant species were reported belonging to 30 families. It was noted that every part of the plant was used for medicine but the most used part was roots (31.25%). Name of plants in Santali dialect is new information

Keywords: Santal, Santali, raranko, rehet ran murgan.

INTRODUCTION:

Dumka holds a long legendary history of its own. The word “Dumka” is derived from a Persian word “Damin-e-koh” which means skirt, hem, border or edge of hills. The name is well justified as Dumka is surrounded by small hills, ridges and cliffs. After the famous Santal insurrection of 1855 known as the “Hul” the new district of Santal Pargana was created exclusively, with Dumka as its headquarters. The dawn of 15th November 2000 saw Jharkhand as the 28th new state of Indian Union and Dumka was given the status of its sub capital.

Ethnic group: The district is dominated by Santals, The largest numbered tribes of Jharkhand. Other important residents are the Paharias (Sauria and Mal Paharia) known as “Hillman” as they reside on the hills. Another tribe like Oraons, Bedia, Mahil, Korea, Karmali, etc also inhabit the land.

Phytoremediation: Santals are earnest conservers of their age-old pattern of living and safeguard their socio-culture norms, customs, totems, and taboos. This practice had led to the continued practice of healthcare system known as *rehet ran murgan*, the meaning of which is medication by roots. Santals believe that *rehet* i.e. the root is the best part of the plants to make *ran* i.e. medicine. They believe that being underground the roots are least exposed to outside contamination and is supposed to be the purest part in a plant body. However, in addition stem, stem bark, leaves, fruit, flower, milk, latex, seeds, seed oil are also used for the preparation of medicine.

Although every other Santal is supposed to know the herbal remedy of simple ailments, some of them have mastered the art and have become a specialized professional herbal practitioner. These persons are called *raranko* i.e. medicine men, singularly as *raranic* i.e. medicine man. These persons mostly hold a prestigious position in the society, considered honest as well as knowledgeable.

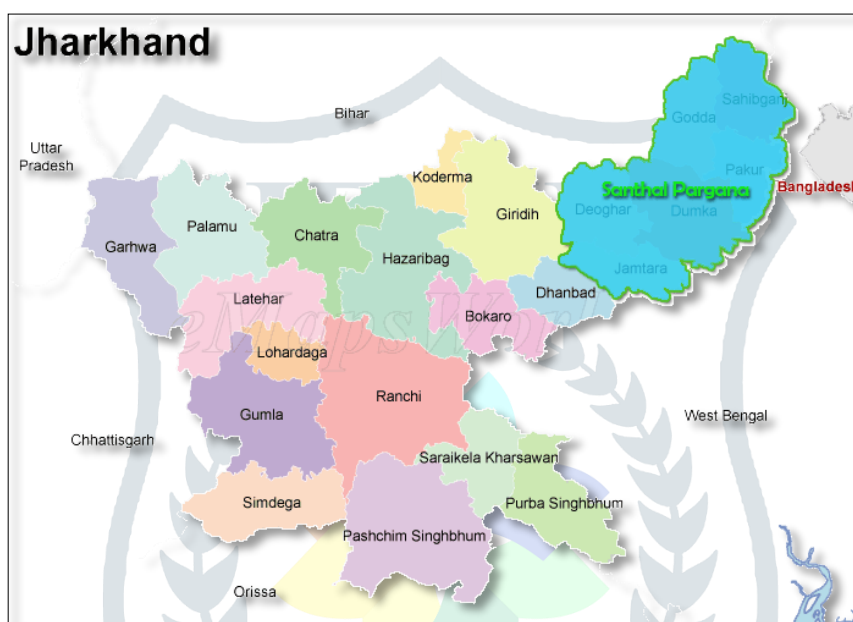
The ancient system prevails in the region in two forms. One, in which a *raranic* is the sole operator. He spends his life practicing herbal therapy alone by himself. He transfers his knowledge to his next generation (son or nephew) only if he finds the recipient fit to inherit the precious knowledge according to the presumed standards (an alcoholic, weak, doubtful character is not considered eligible) otherwise the art dies along with its master. Another form, is the *Guru Shishya Padhati* (teacher pupil system) when a *Guru* (Physician) teaches a batch of selected students about *Bidya* (discourse) of herbal remediation.

The discourse may be of 5-6 months commencing from *Jeth* (Summer) to *Ashwin* (Autumn) up to *Dasae parob* (Durga Puja). The course ends with jubilation by the students called as *Dasae cora*. In the end, the *Guru* leads his disciples to the forest and with his special stick known as *tanini thenga* introduce the plants and its medical properties.

This process is known as *ran jagao* i.e. awakening of medicine. Now the students are supposed to be qualified enough to practice of their own. However, one or two (more efficient ones) pray to the *Guru* to let him/them stay and learn more to get *sid* (the initiation) which is supposed to very difficult task.

Since time immortals Santals were aware of depletion of plant species and had developed preventive measures of its conservation. Peeling, cutting or uprooting parts of medicinal parts in one breadth is one of the many methods of collecting and conserving of plants by the tribes. The process of cleaning, grinding, drying, etc is done by the mother, wife, daughter in law or trusted women of the family however, frying of plants part in certain oil is done by the physician himself.

METHODOLOGY:



Map of Jharkhand with Santhal Pargana division.

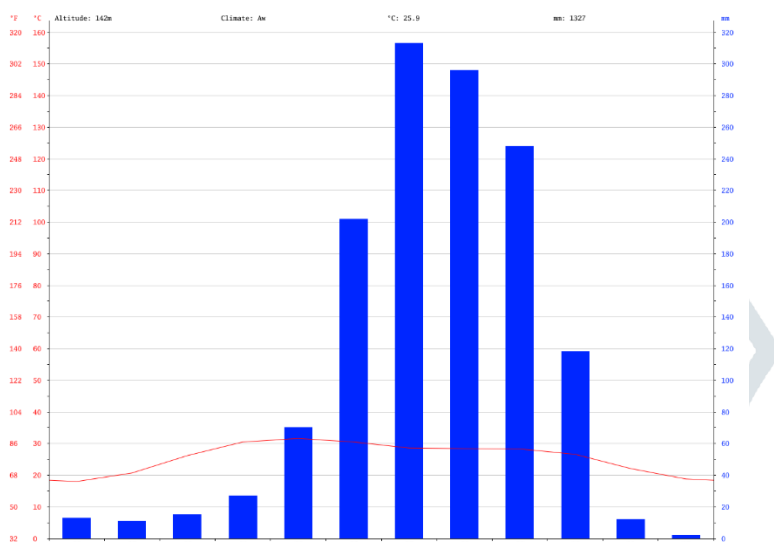


Dumka District in Jharkhand State

Studied Area:

The survey was conducted in Dumka district situated at 86° 16' North latitude and 87°15' East latitude with an average elevation of 137 meters (449ft) From sea level. The topography consists of high ridges and valleys bounded by small hills river

Mayurakshi crosses the district with the famous Massanjore Dam bounded in it. The district has a humid subtropical climate (koppen climate classification) with warm wet summer and mild winters.



The district has an area of 3716.02km² and with one subdivision Dumka. It consists of 10 blocks name the Dumka, Jama, Jarmundi, Kathikund, Gopikandar, Ramgarh, Raneshwar, Saraiyahat, Sikaripara.

Ethnobotanical study: The study was conducted for 18 months in various villages of the district. Information was sought out by interviews and friendly talks. Informants were between 30-75 years of age. The interview was taken from village elders, Pradhan's Nakiki's as well as experienced herbal physicians. Under their guidance, medicinal plants were collected from the village area, fields and forest. Local names of the plant, usable parts, methods of preparation and concerned diseases were noted. Information was seek as described Cotton (1996) Jain and Goel (1995). Dates and months of sample collection were noted. Plant species were identified (Kirtikar and Basu 1999; Raizada 1976, Mishra and Verma, 1992, Saini et al 2010) Vouchers specimen were collected and deposited in the University Department.

Table 1: Plants used in traditional herbal therapy

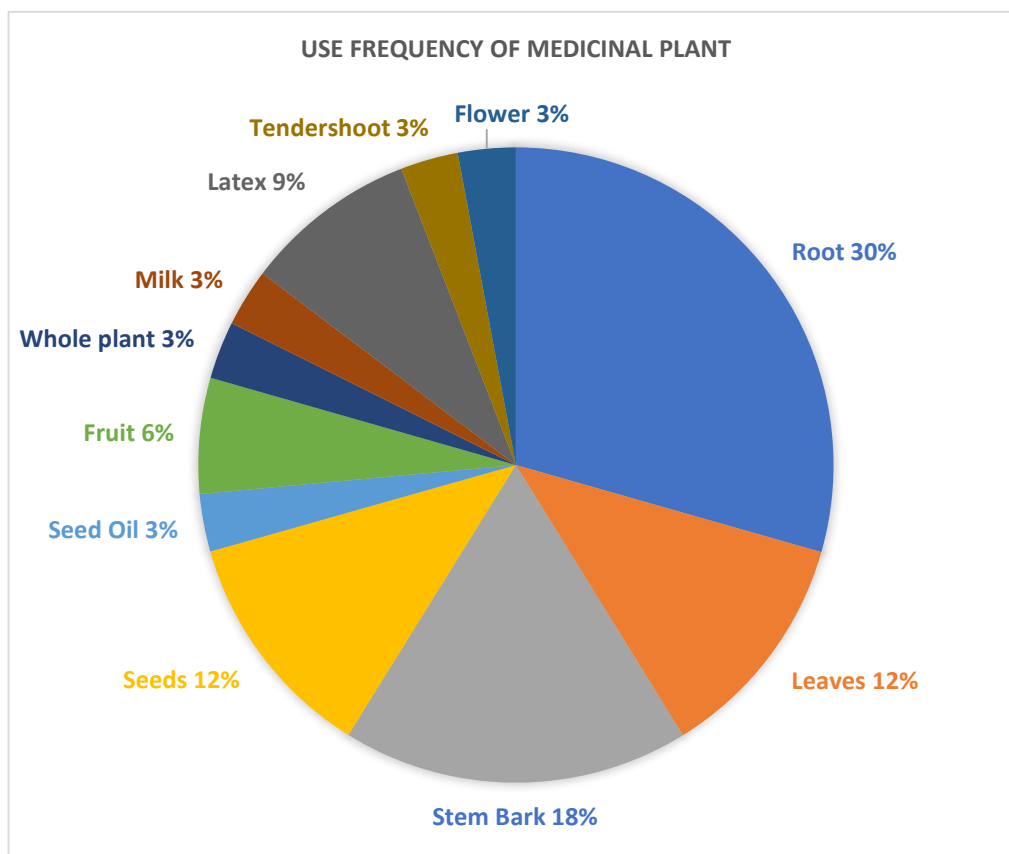
SI.No	Botanical Name	Vernacular Name	Family	Habit	Parts used	Ailments
1	<i>Achyranthus aspera</i> L	Kakralatha	Amaranthaceae	Herb	Root	Jaundice
2	<i>Adhatoda vasica</i> Nees	Bosok	Acranthaceae	Shrub	Leaves	Cough
3	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> Correa	sinje	Rutaceae	Tree	fruit	Constipation
4	<i>Allangium lamarckii</i> Thw	Dhela	Alangiaceae	Shrub	Seed	Hydrocele
5	<i>Aristolochia indica</i> L	Jhunka god'	Aristolociaceae	Shrub	Root	Snake bite
6	<i>Asparagus racemosus</i> Willd	Kedar nanri	Lilliaceae	Climber	Root	Flatulence
7	<i>Borassus flabellifer</i> L	Tale dare	Arecaceae	Tree	Root	Blood Clotting
8	<i>Cassime galuca</i> Rottb	Buch	Celastraceae	Climber	Root	wound

9	<i>Centella asiatica</i> L	Rote arak'	Apiaceae	Herb	Whole plant	Jaundice Urinary Infection
10	<i>Croton oblongifolius</i> Roxb	Gote rehet	Euphorbiaceae	Shrub	Root	Constipation, snake bite
11	<i>Coix lacryma</i> Willd	Gargadi	Poaceae	Herb	Seeds	Chickenpox
12	<i>Clorodendrum infortunatum</i> Gaertn	Bharni	Verbenaceae	Shrub	Root Bark	Diarrhea
13	<i>Calotropis procera</i> Roxb	Akona	Asclepiadaceae	Shrub	Latex	Rheumatism
14	<i>Datura metal</i> L	Datra	Solanaceae	Shrub	Root	Rheumatism
15	<i>Erythrina indica</i> Lam	Marar	Fabaceae	Tree	Stem Bark	Skin Disease
16	<i>Euphorbia hirta</i> Lam	Pusikata	Euphorbiaceae	herb	Milk	Cataract, Mole
17	<i>Gardenia latifolia</i> Aiton	Popro	Rubiaceae	Tree	Stem Bark	Cough and cold
18	<i>Holarrhena antidysentrica</i> Wall	Hat baha	Apocynaceae	Tree	Stem Bark	Diarrhea dysentery
19	<i>Ipomea purpurea</i> Lamk	Ji arak'	Convolvulaceae	Shrub	Latex	Wounds
20	<i>Jatropha curcus</i> L	Bhindra	Euphorbiaceae	Shrub	Latex	Dysentery
					Tender shoots	Dental Trouble
21	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L	Ul	Anacardiaceae	Tree	Stem Bark	Jaundice
22	<i>Nyctanthes arbortristis</i> L	Saparom	Oleaceae	Tree	Leaves	Fever
23	<i>Oroxylum indicum</i> L	Bana hatta	Bignoniaceae	Tree	Seeds	Ear Infection
24	<i>Pongamia pinnata</i> L	Koronj	Papilionaeae	Tree	Seed Oil	Skin Disease
25	<i>Pterospermum acerifolium</i> Willd	Muchkunda	Sterculaceae	Tree	Stem Bark	Urinary Infection
26	<i>Phoenix acaulis</i> Roxb	Khijur	Arecaceae	Shrub	Root	Pyorrhoea
27	<i>Ricinus communis</i> L	Eradom	Euphorbiaceae	Shrub	Seed, Leaves	Rheumatism
28	<i>Solanum xanthocarpium</i>	Rangini	Solanaceae	Herb	Fruit	Cough, Dental Carries
29	<i>Sida cordifolia</i> L	Chipcheri	Malvaceae	Herb	Root	Urinary Infection
30	<i>Shorea robusta</i> Gaertn	Sarjom	Dipteroarpaceae	Tree	Stem Bark	Diarrhea dysentery
31	<i>Tegetus erecta</i> L	Genda	Asteraceae	Herb	Leaves	Ear Infection, Insect Sting
32	<i>Woodfordia fruticosa</i> L	Icha baha	Lythraceae	Shrub	Flower	Diabetes

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Data obtained after survey reveals the availability of herbal cure for almost every disease, from common cough and cold fever, cuts, wounds, boils, carbuncles, to cataract of eyes, dental carries, ear infection, skin diseases, blood clotting

and more complex ailments like jaundice, diabetes, hydrocele, leucorrhoea, urinary infection, etc. The habit of medicinal plants vary from small herbs woody shrubs to large trees. The habitat varied from marshy plants like *Centella asiatica* L to forest species like *Careya arborea* Roxb, *Woodfordia fruticosa* L, etc. Many plants were easily accessible from the home yard like *Mangifera indica* L, were as very tall trees like *Borassus flabellifer* L were in the vicinity of fields. *Jatropha curcas* L, *Clerodendron infortunatum* Gaertn were mostly found outside in the village borders. Roots and root bark were the most used (31.25%) part along with barks of trees, leaves, flower, fruits, seeds, latex, milk, juice etc. Ornamental plants like *Tegetus erecta* were also used for its medicinal value. 32 plant species belonging to 27 families were identified for its curative purpose in various diseases. Family Euphorbiaceae (21.87%) was the most used and followed by family Solanaceae (9.37%), family Araceae and family Asteraceae (6.25%).



CONCLUSION

The paper shed light on a rare traditional method of medication system practiced by Santals *rehet ran murgan*. The inherited herbal lore was transferred from one generation to other only verbally. It was found that the conservation strategies were in the mind of santals since ages which resulted in unique steps of safeguarding of species right from its collection of usages. It was found that the ancient therapeutic method was enough to treat various diseases from simple to complex ailments.

The survey provided proper and authentic documentation of 32 plants species with its therapeutic uses. The Santali names of plants along with its botanical names were new and useful information.

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