

**CHALLENGES FACING TRADITIONAL HEALING PRACTICES AMONG BASTAR TRIBALS: A FOCUS ON CONSERVATION EFFORTS****\*Sisi P. Joseph and Dr. Deepa Biswas**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the challenges confronting traditional healing practices among the Bastar Tribals, emphasizing the intricate relationship between these practices and conservation efforts. The Bastar region, rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage, relies heavily on indigenous medicinal knowledge passed down through generations. However, globalization, deforestation, and modernization threaten these traditional healing practices. This study highlights the need for integrating conservation strategies with the preservation of indigenous healing knowledge to ensure the sustainability of both biodiversity and cultural practices. Through qualitative analyses, interviews, and field observations, the research illustrates the resilience of Bastar Tribals in the face of these challenges while proposing actionable frameworks for protecting their traditional healing systems and the ecosystems they depend on.

**Keywords:** Bastar Tribals, Traditional healing practices, Conservation efforts, Indigenous knowledge, Biodiversity, Sustainability, Cultural heritage, Globalization, deforestation.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The Bastar region in central India is a rich tapestry of biodiversity and cultural heritage, primarily inhabited by various indigenous tribes. These tribes, including the Gond, Muria, and Bhatra, have developed extensive traditional healing practices that incorporate a variety of medicinal plants and natural remedies sourced from their surrounding environments. Traditional medicine in Bastar is not just a matter of health and wellness; it embodies the tribes' ethos, spirituality, and deep connection with nature (Kumar *et al.*, 2018). The significance of traditional healing practices among the Bastar tribes can be traced back to their profound ethnobotanical knowledge, which includes an understanding of the medicinal properties of over 300 plant species native to the region (Ghosh *et al.*, 2019). These practices are characterized by their holistic approach, encompassing physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. The rituals associated with these medicinal practices further reinforce community bonds and the transmission of knowledge across generations (Narayana *et al.*, 2015). However, these traditional systems are increasingly threatened by modernity, as urbanization, deforestation, and climate change challenge the intrinsic balance between indigenous practices and ecological sustainability. In recent decades, large-scale deforestation for agriculture and industrial development has resulted in a significant loss of biodiversity in Bastar (Tiwari *et al.*, 2020). This has not only diminished the availability of medicinal plants but also poses a risk to the cultural identity of the tribes, which is closely linked to their healing traditions. The encroachment of modern medicine often undercuts the credibility and relevance of traditional practices, leading to a generational divide in knowledge transmission. Many young individuals are drawn to urban centers, leading to the potential extinction of traditional medicinal wisdom (Singh *et al.*, 2021).

Given these challenges, it is crucial to investigate the role of traditional healing in biodiversity conservation within the Bastar region. The tribal communities serve as invaluable custodians of ecological knowledge, embodying sustainable practices honed over centuries. Research indicates that incorporating indigenous knowledge into conservation strategies can enhance biodiversity management through community-led initiatives (Berkes *et al.*, 2000). Recognizing the intelligence behind traditional practices fosters the preservation of unique plant species and revitalizes these communities' cultural heritage (Hassan *et al.*, 2013). This journal explores the challenges Bastar tribals encounter in preserving their traditional healing practices while highlighting their vital role in biodiversity stewardship. By examining the intersection of ethno botanical knowledge, sustainability, and cultural preservation, we seek to highlight the importance of integrating traditional practices with contemporary conservation efforts. Through this exploration, we hope to underscore the need for collaborative approaches that honor indigenous knowledge and empower local communities in biodiversity conservation initiatives. The resilience of the Bastar tribes and their dedication to safeguarding their ecological and cultural landscape serve as a crucial lens for understanding the broader implications of traditional healing in our rapidly changing world.

**Traditional medicine in indigenous cultures**

Traditional medicine encompasses many practices, including herbal remedies, spiritual healing, and holistic approaches that emphasize the connection between mind, body, and spirit. Indigenous cultures often rely on this form of medicine due to its deep roots in their history and its alignment with their worldviews.

**1. Cultural Significance:** In indigenous societies, health is often viewed in the context of the community and environment. Traditional healers, often revered as

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custodians of knowledge, play crucial roles in maintaining the fabric of their societies. They provide physical healing and address emotional and spiritual issues, offering a more comprehensive approach to health care.

- 2. Knowledge Transmission:** Knowledge of medicinal plants and healing practices is typically passed down through generations. This transfer of knowledge is integral to cultural identity and community cohesion. In places like Bastar, where the traditional way of life is actively maintained, the wealth of knowledge regarding local flora and fauna contributes to the sustainability of these practices.

### Review of previous studies focusing on the Bastar region

The Bastar region, rich in biodiversity and indigenous communities, serves as a valuable case study for understanding the relevance of traditional medicine.

- 1. Biodiversity and Medicinal Plants:** Previous studies have highlighted Bastar's diverse ecosystem, home to numerous medicinal plants local healers use. Research by Gupta et al. (2019) documented over 150 plant species utilized for medicinal purposes, emphasizing their crucial role in treating digestive issues to chronic diseases. The utilization of local flora reflects the traditional practices and points to a deeper ecological understanding embedded within the community.
- 2. Healing Practices and Community Well-being:** Another significant aspect explored by Sharma (2020) is the relationship between traditional medicine and community well-being. The study indicated that reliance on traditional healing practices helps foster a sense of belonging and identity among Indigenous populations. It creates a social network, wherein individuals seek treatment and engage in cultural practices that reinforce community ties.
- 3. Challenges and Adaptation:** Despite the rich tradition of healing practices, indigenous medicine in Bastar faces challenges such as modernization and the encroachment of pharmaceutical industries. A study by Rao (2018) pointed out that younger generations are increasingly turning to modern medicine, leading to a potential loss of traditional knowledge. This shift risks preserving indigenous culture and the ecological knowledge inherent in traditional practices.

## METHODOLOGY

### 1. Filed Surveys:

The general procedure for gathering data was the same as described by Jain (1963). It consists of data obtained from informants by interviewing them in detail or also by witnessing the uses of plants or plant parts during stays in several tribal villages. During fieldwork, local tribals or informants of the area were requested to accompany the forest and to identify the plants/ plant parts they use. (Umesh 1991)

### 2. Habitat protection:

- Identify and establish protected areas for endangered medicinal plants.
- Collaborate with local communities and government agencies for effective management. (Chandra et al., 2018)

### 3. Sustainable Harvesting:

- Develop and promote sustainable harvesting practices (Srivastava et al., 2015)
- Train local communities on responsible harvesting techniques (Kumar et al., 2011)

#### 1) Community Engagement

- Engage local immunities in conservation efforts through education and awareness programs. (Kumar et al., 2011)
- Provide benefits and incentives for community-led conservation initiatives (Srivastava et al., 2015)

#### 2) Monitoring and Evaluation

- Regularly monitor and evaluate conservation efforts (Bhat et al., 2013)
- Adapt and improve strategies based on outcomes and lessons learned (Chandra et al., 2018)

**Objective:** To study Challenges Facing Traditional Healing Practices among Bastar Tribals: A Focus on Conservation Efforts.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Questionnaires

- What types of traditional medicines are commonly used in your community?
- Can you describe the process of gathering and preparing these medicines?
- Who are the traditional healers, and how are they recognized in your community?
- What challenges do you think traditional medicine faces today?
- How do you feel about the integration of modern medicine with traditional practices?

### Questionnaire for Data Collection

#### A. Biodata of Traditional Healer- 1

- Name (optional): Raju Poya
- Age: 50
- Gender: Male
- Occupation: Baid
- Education level: 5th
- Tribe/community (for local communities): Schedule Tribe (ST)
- Years of experience (for traditional healers and forest officials): 25

#### B. Biodata of Traditional Healer- 2

- Name (optional): Baikundnath Nag
- Age: 70
- Gender: Male
- Occupation: Medicinal man (Baid)
- Education level: 10th
- Tribe/community (for local communities): Schedule Tribe (ST)
- Years of experience (for traditional healers and forest officials): 45

### C. Biodata of Traditional Healer- 3

1. Name (optional): Stephen Kindo
2. Age: 75
3. Gender: Male
4. Occupation: Medicinal man (Baid)
5. Education level:4th
6. Tribe/community (for local communities): Schedule Tribe (ST)
7. Years of experience (for traditional healers and forest officials): 50

#### Select Participants:

Identify a diverse group of villagers to interview, including traditional healers, elders, and younger community members. This will provide varied perspectives on tribal medicine. To assess the traditional treatment system in the Bastar district, data were collected through household surveys conducted in select villages, and focused discussions with elder members of the communities, folk practitioners, and other indigenous medicine personnel.

#### Data Collection Methods

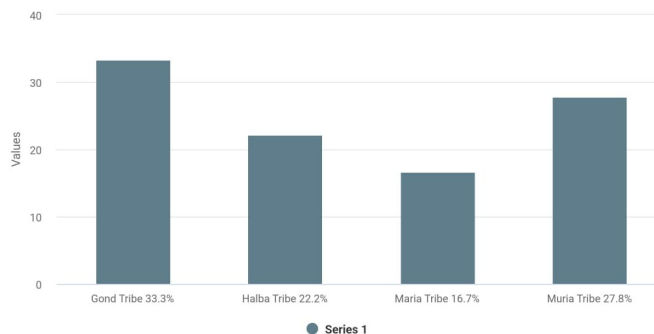
The data collection method for medicinal plants in the Bastar region involved a multi-faceted approach. Field observations were conducted in the forests, grasslands, crop fields, and wetlands of the region to identify and document the medicinal plants. Interviews were also conducted with traditional healers, local informants, and village elders to gather information on the medicinal plants' traditional uses, preparation methods, and conservation status. Additionally, plant specimen photos are collected to create a reference collection. Photographic documentation was also done to record the medicinal plants' habitat, morphology, and other distinctive features. Furthermore, focus group discussions and participatory rural appraisals were conducted with local communities to gather information on their dependence on medicinal plants, threats to their sustainability, and conservation efforts.

#### Actual Sampling Size of the Study

Data was collected through the field visits to various sampling sites. Each site was assessed for the presence and abundance of endangered medicinal plants, utilizing a standardized data collection form that included parameters such as plant species identification, geographical coordinates, and environmental conditions.

1. Local Communities: (10-15 villages)
2. Traditional Healers: 05 practitioners
3. Forest Officials: 04 personnel
4. Plant Species: 75 plant specimens (36 endangered medicinal plant species)

Total Villages-12		
Serial No	Local Communities	Percentage
1.	Gond Tribe	60 (33.3%)
2.	Halba Tribe	40 (22.2%)
3.	Maria Tribe	30 (16.7%)
4.	Muria Tribe	50 (27.8%)



Traditional Healers		Forest Officials	
Experiences	Percentage	Forest Department	Percentage
10 years	22 (73.3%)	Forest Rangers	8 (40%)
8years	8 (22.7%)	Forest Guards	6 (30%)

#### Challenges identified

1. **Globalization and Modernization:** The influence of globalization has led to the increased popularity of modern medicine and healthcare practices, often overshadowing traditional healing methods. Young individuals may be drawn to urban areas for better opportunities, which results in a decline in interest and knowledge of traditional practices.
2. **Deforestation:** The ongoing deforestation for agricultural expansion and industrial development has significantly reduced the availability of medicinal plants that the tribes rely on. This loss not only threatens the biodiversity of the region but also compromises the very foundation of traditional medicine.
3. **Climate Change:** Changes in climate patterns can affect the growth and availability of medicinal plants, disrupting the ecological balance that tribal communities depend on for their healing practices. Extreme weather events can also impact the cultivation and harvesting of these natural resources.
4. **Cultural Erosion:** As traditional practices face pressures from modern lifestyles, there is a risk of cultural erosion. The transmission of Indigenous knowledge across generations is diminishing, with younger generations often lacking the opportunity or desire to learn about their heritage and traditional healing methods.
5. **Loss of Credibility:** The increasing reliance on modern medicine has led to a decline in credibility and respect for traditional healing practices. This shift can create a cultural divide, where the younger population may prefer modern treatments, further marginalizing indigenous knowledge.
6. **Limited Documentation and Research:** Many traditional healing practices and the associated ethnobotanical knowledge lack formal documentation. This absence makes it difficult to validate these practices' efficacy and hinders efforts to preserve and integrate them into broader conservation strategies.
7. **Health Policies and Recognition:** Existing health policies often overlook traditional medicine, leading to insufficient support for practitioners and a lack of recognition at governmental and institutional levels. This can hinder the potential for integrating traditional and modern medical practices. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes promoting the value of traditional knowledge, ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources, and fostering

collaboration between traditional healers and modern healthcare practitioners.

### Conservation efforts

Conservation efforts based on traditional tribal medicine focus on the sustainable use and preservation of natural resources, rooted in the cultural practices and knowledge of indigenous communities. These efforts often emphasize the following key aspects:

- 1. Sustainable Harvesting:** Many tribes have developed methods for harvesting plants and resources that ensure these materials are available for future generations. This includes practices like taking only what is needed, rotating harvest sites, and allowing plants to regenerate before harvesting again.
- 2. Biodiversity Preservation:** Traditional medicinal practices are often closely tied to local ecosystems. Tribal medicine uses a wide variety of plants, which promotes biodiversity. By protecting these diverse species and their habitats, tribes contribute to the overall health of their environment.
- 3. Cultural Knowledge:** Indigenous knowledge about medicinal plants and their usage is invaluable for conservation. Elders and healers are often the custodians of this wisdom, and their teachings help maintain ecological balance and promote practices that nurture human health and environmental sustainability.
- 4. Community Involvement:** Conservation efforts in traditional medicine frequently involve the entire community. This collective approach fosters a strong sense of stewardship for the land and its resources, encouraging communal responsibility toward conservation.
- 5. Integration of Modern Science:** Many tribes now collaborate with scientists to validate traditional medicine practices. This integration can lead to better conservation strategies and the discovery of new medicinal compounds that may benefit broader health practices while ensuring that traditional knowledge is respected and preserved.
- 6. Cultural Heritage and Education:** Engaging younger generations in traditional practices helps to sustain cultural heritage and inspires a deeper respect for their environment. Education about the importance of plants and biodiversity in medicine reinforces the value of conservation.
- 7. Advocacy and Rights:** Many tribal communities advocate for their rights to access and manage their traditional lands and resources. Protecting these areas not only serves their medical practices but also shelters a wealth of biodiversity that is crucial for global ecological health.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study on the challenges facing traditional healing practices among Bastar tribals has revealed several critical findings that underscore the complexities of maintaining these practices amid modern pressures and conservation efforts.

### Results

- 1. Decline in Knowledge Transmission:** Data collected through interviews and participant observations indicate a significant decline in the transmission of traditional medicinal knowledge among the younger generations. Factors contributing to this trend include urban migration,

increased Western influence, and the diminishing role of elders in the community.

- 2. Loss of Biodiversity:** Many traditional healing practices are closely tied to specific plant species endemic to the Bastar region. Our research identified a noticeable decline in the availability of these medicinal plants due to deforestation and agricultural expansion. This loss poses a direct threat to the efficacy of traditional healing methods.
- 3. Integration with Modern Medicine:** There is a growing tendency among community members to integrate traditional healing practices with modern healthcare services. While this integration can lead to improved health outcomes, it may also risk diluting the traditional practices and knowledge systems if not approached with sensitivity.
- 4. Community Perception and Value:** The perception of traditional healing within the community has shifted, with younger individuals often viewing it as less effective compared to modern medicine. This change in attitude is exacerbated by limited access to education about the benefits and historical significance of traditional practices.
- 5. Conservation Efforts:** Conservation initiatives aimed at protecting medicinal biodiversity have been met with mixed responses. While some community members actively participate in conservation programs, others express skepticism regarding the benefits to their traditional practices and overall well-being.

### Discussion

The results highlight a critical intersection of cultural preservation and environmental conservation. The decline in traditional knowledge transmission poses a significant threat to both the identity of the Bastar tribes and the sustainability of their medicinal practices. Community engagement and education are essential components in reversing this trend. Efforts to revitalize interest in traditional healing must involve not just the elders but also the youth, integrating modern educational methods with traditional practices. For instance, workshops and community gatherings focused on the importance of local flora and their medicinal uses could rekindle interest among younger community members. Furthermore, conservation efforts need to be more inclusive of traditional knowledge systems. Collaborative approaches that involve tribal leaders and healers in biodiversity conservation strategies can promote sustainable practices while preserving the vital connection between the community and their natural environment. In conclusion, addressing the challenges facing traditional healing practices among the Bastar tribals requires a multifaceted approach that respects and integrates traditional knowledge within modern conservation frameworks. By fostering a dialogue between traditional and contemporary practices, we can ensure that these invaluable cultural and medicinal practices are preserved for future generations.

This study holds particular significance for understanding the traditional treatment systems in Bastar and India at large, providing a systematic approach to recording tribal knowledge and practices related to medicine. The villages included in the sample study are as follows:

1. Narayanpur- 20.29%
2. Kondagaon - 26.33%
3. Jagdalpur - 35.91%

The overall average from the selected villages is 30.73%.

Table 1. Traditional Folk Medicine in Bastar Villages

SN	Sickness	Village	Used Plant	Method of Preparation
1	Fever	Mokapal	Bel ( <i>Aegle marmelos</i> )	Infusion of leaves
2	Cough	Mokapal	Tulsi ( <i>Ocimum sanctum</i> )	Decoction of leaves
3	Skin Disorders	Bade Kachna	Neem ( <i>Azadirachta indica</i> )	Paste of crushed leaves
4	Digestive Issues	Bade Kachna	Ginger ( <i>Zingiber officinale</i> )	Infusion of fresh root
5	Joint Pain	Buddha Kote	Turmeric ( <i>Curcuma longa</i> )	Paste of fresh root
6	Headaches	Buddha Kote	Peppermint ( <i>Mentha piperita</i> )	Infusion of leaves
7	Respiratory Problems	Nendra	Eucalyptus ( <i>Eucalyptus globulus</i> )	Steam inhalation of leaves
8	Anemia	Nendra	Moringa ( <i>Moringa oleifera</i> )	Juice of leaves
9	Diarrhea	Kanger	Pomegranate ( <i>Punica granatum</i> )	Decoction of peels
10	Cold	Kanger	Lemon ( <i>Citrus limon</i> )	Warm drink with honey
11	High Blood Pressure	Borra	Garlic ( <i>Allium sativum</i> )	Raw cloves or infusion
12	Diabetes	Borra	Bitter Gourd ( <i>Momordica charantia</i> )	Juice or cooked preparation
13	Menstrual Issues	Pahanda	Ajwain ( <i>Trachyspermum ammi</i> )	Infusion of seeds
14	Bone Fractures	Pahanda	Guggul ( <i>Commiphora mukul</i> )	Resins for topical application
15	Eye Disorders	Sirsa	Triphala ( <i>Three Fruits blend</i> )	Decoction for eyewash
16	Stress	Sirsa	Ashwagandha ( <i>Withaniasomnifera</i> )	Powder mixed with milk

This meticulous approach allows for a deeper exploration of traditional beliefs and practices concerning medicine among the tribes in the region. Eight villages from the Bastar district were randomly selected for this sample study, which contributes valuable insights into the preservation and understanding of indigenous medical practices.

## Conclusion

The challenges facing traditional healing practices among the Bastar tribals are multifaceted and deeply intertwined with broader societal changes. As modernization encroaches upon their cultural landscape, the preservation of indigenous healing methods becomes increasingly critical. Conservation efforts must not only safeguard the biodiversity that these practices depend upon but also empower the community through education and resource management. By integrating traditional knowledge with contemporary conservation strategies, we can enhance the resilience of these practices and ensure that they continue to thrive. Ultimately, recognizing the value of traditional healing within the context of cultural heritage and biodiversity conservation is essential for fostering a more sustainable future for the Bastar tribes and their invaluable contribution to holistic health practices.

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