

Health care system of Kom: A study on conflicting wisdom dialogue.

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ABSTRACT

Traditional knowledge system has always been the foundation of the Kom health care practice. However, with the advent of Christianity in the 18th-century postcolonial world, a new form of practice was found to be knitted in the system. With the inclusion of an advanced biomedical system, there seems to be a conflict of interest in the health care system of the Kom people. This paper will try to focus on the conflicting dialogues in the healing system practice by the people of the Kom tribe. The present data is collected through interview method and supplemented by Secondary source of data.

Keywords: Christianity, Dialogues, Healthcare, Medicine, Traditional knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

The health care system is the method by which health care is financed, organized, and delivered to a population. This includes the issue of access, expenditure, and resource. The goal of a healthcare system is to enhance the population's health in the most effective manner possible in light of a society's available resources and competing needs (Pawls and Glover, 1995). And this practice of health care starts only when a person gets sick or has a disease. Meanwhile what counts as a disease changes over time, partly due to increasing health expectations and changes in diagnostic ability, but mainly for social and economic reasons. So do the definitions of health and of appropriate healthcare providers are also subject to cultural variability. Thus, a single system cannot offer effective curative and preventive healthcare treatment.

Anthropological investigations of healthcare practices have demonstrated that medical pluralism, or the existence and use of many different healthcare alternatives within societies, is the rule and not the exception the world over (Leslie 1976, 1980; Durkin-Longley 1984). With respect to this Agrawal (2014) have studied the co-existence of the indigenous healing systems with the modern medical practices among the Murias of Bastar, in which the modern health facilities fail to make the expected impact because they do not consider the region-specific cultural mindset of the people. The traditional healing systems tend to complement modern medicine, where the latter fails to provide an answer.

It is a well known fact that indigenous populations worldwide are experiencing social, cultural, demographic, nutritional, and psycho-emotional changes that profoundly impact health (Valeggia and Snodgrass, 2015). And these societies show widespread supernatural healing practices and use ethno medicine. Then with time, the domination and superiority of biomedicine over traditional medicine have been visible from postcolonial times to till date. Apart from this health care dialogue, with the advent of Christianity, a new form of beliefs and ideas comes into play whose practices are contrasted with the others, giving the patient an alternative treatment choice. Thus any wrong choice of treatment opt by the patient may lead to a negative impact.

The main objective of this paper is to focus on the conflicting dialogues in the healing system practice by the people of the Kom tribe, who were once deeply rooted in the traditional knowledge system, converted in Christianity in 18th century and now exposed to modern medical health care.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is conducted among the Kom tribes of Manipur, i.e., one of the 34 scheduled tribes of the state. Sparsely distributed within seven districts of the state out of 16 districts. The data for this study was gathered through the Interview method (open-ended interview) among religious leaders and representatives, a traditional healer (Thempu), and informants from different age groups. In some instances, informants were selected through a "snowballing" technique, in which villagers were asked for the names of the most knowledgeable person who was interviewed and asked for other names, and so on. Further supplemented by a secondary source of data. The present paper is qualitative in nature.

Health care system of Kom

The indigenous healing practices of the Kom show an intermingling with their religious beliefs. The traditional religion of Kom is animistic; however, with the advent of Christianity in the early 18th century, it is knitted around the ethics of traditional belief, newly adopted Christianity, and modern medical science. The Kom traditional knowledge of therapeutic process of diagnosis begins, as soon as the first symptoms of illness are noticed. And this diagnosis processes among Kom mainly involve divination, trance possession, and physical examination. The shaman who does the process of healing is called Thempu.

The diagnosis process also has some latent social implications, which are very important in the indigenous context. Sometimes, sorcery and witchcraft are also designated as causes of illness. The healers of the Kom society have their methods and treatment rooted in supernatural belief systems. The Thempu uses other methods of diagnosis and cure, such as divination by chicken, sacrificing of a dog, and sanctifying the village (Khukham) in time of epidemic, etc., with symbolic implications. In the meantime, with the advent of Christianity and modern medical science, the healthcare system of the Kom faced ethical medical pluralism.

As for example, when a person gets sick he or she would sought treatment based on the severity of the illness or the patient's and family trust and belief towards the three healthcare system. If the patients is diagnose with some common mild known disease like headache, fever, common cold, and dysentery he/ she would settle with the known traditional ethno medicine. And if this can't be cure one would get help from the modern medical health care system. According to the diagnosed disease the patient would engage all the healing system known to him. Here if the patient is diagnosed with some serious disease like kidney failure, stroke, cancer, and liver dysfunction the people would engage the visioner for prayer. And if the visioner simply asked to continue with the medical attention, there is no conflict of interest in treating the patient and one would simply put their faith to the doctor in prayer. But if the visioner report for a supernatural cause one have to withdraw their treatment from the modern medical care this provoke a conflict of interest among the patient and the family members depending upon their faith and trust towards the medical system.

Depending upon the severity of the cause, simple sacrificial prayer would suffice the problem. In case of witchcraft and sorcery report, cross checking of forefathers enmity and practices of is being conducted. Because it is belief that there is always a counter dead between two families engage in witchcraft. As the people has converted into Christianity they could no longer engage in witchcraft for stopping the cause effect but rather turn to their Almighty God in prayer. Some would opt for different healing options under the umbrella of Christian faith healing.

Though the Kom indigenous healing system was deeply rooted in the traditional worldview, the community has changed its attitude towards modern medicine. Along with the advancement of science and technology and exposure of the people in education system some would opt for the modern medical system. The presence of shamanistic, herbal, Christian faith healing and modern medical system provides people with several alternatives, thus creating a situation of medical

pluralism. When a person gets sick, he or she chooses between indigenous, religious, and modern medical systems. The therapeutic process ends if the patient is cured after a particular treatment. If he does not respond to the treatment, or the condition of the patient worsens, another healer or treatment methods are sought. This process continues until the patient is cured or has succumbed to the illness.

During this whole process of health care a person face different types of dilemma based on his knowledge, faith and liberal outlook towards healing a disease. Though a particular healthcare system may cure a particular disease there is always a question of mental satisfaction whether this could have been easily cure in another or another. Depending upon the availability and accessibility of the healthcare once could opt for modern medical care. And if economic reason plays a role than one go for the traditional knowledge system. But due to lack of scientific evidence the liberal minds of the people have to make a choice of healing practice. There come a time when neither the modern biomedicine nor the ethno medicine can diagnosed or cure a particular disease due to lack of well develop infrastructure or knowledge. During this time the people would turn to the faith healing, visioners who diagnosed another aspect of cause of the disease which in times come in contrast with that of the former healing methods.

Thus, it is very much important to know the patients history and practices in diagnosing a disease because being an indigeneous person and weave around supernatural belief and practices. It creates conflicting dialogues among the knowledge system of the people.

CONCLUSION

Every society has its own way of generating a traditional knowledge base,suitable for its people and their surrounding environment. Nevertheless, the presence of a traditional system of medicine is equally undeniable, even though the domination of biomedicine can be seen in all spheres of the health sector, from primary to tertiary levels of care. The traditional system of medicine (TSM) explains health in terms of ecosystem and community-specific health practices, approaches, knowledge, and beliefs embedded in the community's worldviews and value systems (Guite,2022). At the same time, faith healing practice in the Christianity context gives assurance to the patient peace of mind and satisfaction.All the healing practices may not be fully effective, but they do have their function at a psychological level. People have immense faith in their faith healing, which tends to dissolve the negative feelings of anxiety and concern for the sick person.

The patients feel cured after receiving the treatment, which is a crucial aspect of any medical system, and the patient should know that he is responding to the treatment. The choice of a particular mode of treatment is made by a decision-making strategy that provides the best available choice. This choice is dependent on several conditions such as the gravity and nature of the illness, one's faith in a particular medical system, accessibility, and availability of medical facilities, patient's gender, economic status, his/ her education level, exposure to the outside world, previous experiences, etc.

The discussion on the Kom indigenous system shows its rationality, which can be understood only in its native concern. Though the sustainability of health is all about the availability, accessibility, and affordability of health services through different medical and healthcare systems. The differential access to health care, systems of medicine, and the perception of the disease produce health inequality and inequities. Thus, a proper awareness of disease cause and effect in the context of the native concern has to be provided to the society and medical practitioners in general and the patient in particular. Followed by the proper documentation of the health care system of the traditional knowledge and case study of the people.

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