

Namasudra's Traditional Beliefs and Folk Medicine in the Curing of Diseases

Krishna Kanta Dhali

Assistant Professor of History, Gobardanga Hindu College, West Bengal

Abstract: *In the early nineteenth century the deteriorating nature of Bengali religion and culture has been observed due to the influence of Brahminism, separations among castes and varnas, clashes and animosity among religions and also because of the impact of western culture. Religious thought, humanity and religious values also declined. The subaltern was severely oppressed by the aristocratic classes. In such a period of darkness and religious disrepute, Sri Harichand Thakur as a luminaire appeared in the form of an incarnation. He was a possessor of spiritual power and the god of the scheduled class of Dalits. Sri Harichand Thakur emerged as a redeemer for the Dalits who were disregarded and deprived of education and also for the minority groups. His birth led to a major change in the religious culture of Bengal and India, social thought and political thought of those people whose religious thoughts were fused and lost their rights. With the rise of Sri Harichand Thakur, the Dalit Renaissance of Bengal started in history. This renaissance was not confined to religion, culture and social movements. He tried to cure diseases by coordinating spiritual power with traditional medical treatment and in every section, he has been capable to make people recover. It was published in Indian Medical Gazette that dreadful diseases such as malaria, cholera, pox, black fever, plague, leprosy, etc emerged as an epidemic in the year 1820, 1826, 1827, 1831-33 and 1838-40. In that time, Sri Harichand Thakur himself witnessed these epidemics and realistically at a young age, he continued showing an urge to alleviate these ailments. Towards the beginning of the nineteenth century apart from bigger Chandsi treatment, Ayurvedic treatment was also conventional in Bengal's Faridpur, Jessore, Khulna, Barishal, Mymensingh, Dhaka, Kolkata, etc. But the medical treatment was absent in the remote villages. As a result, persons worn out of illness used to come to Harichand Thakur with the hope of healing of affliction. This human sympathetic monk won't dishearten such persons. Sometimes with the help of mental treatment and again sometimes with the help of indigenous herbs or natural ways he used to recover such persons. I try to investigate that what was the provision for healing of ailments of Sri Harichand Thakur? What was the process for curing diseases? What were the medicines for healing of ailments and is there any aptness of such medicines in the contemporary context?*

Keywords: Darkness, Dalits, Mental treatment, Medicines

Towards the beginning of the nineteenth century apart from bigger Chandsi treatment, Ayurvedic treatment was also conventional in Bengal's Faridpur, Jessore, Khulna, Barishal, Mymensingh, Dhaka, Kolkata, etc. But the medical treatment was absent in the remote villages. Sri Harichand Thakur was born in Bengal at a juncture when the livelihood of Bengal's Dalits, Antyajias, outraged, disgraced and socially oppressed classes was not peaceful. But Thakur created a new revolution by awakening education, health, social, economic, political and above all spiritual consciousness among every people. This revolution of Thakur, on the one hand, is the target of the path of convergence of a new life of perishable human society and on the other, it is one among many ways for gaining forever pleasure of the aesthetic abode of gods by overcoming happiness, sorrow, disease of the worldly life. Thus, the thought consciousness and work procedure of Thakur, on the one hand, has inspired people in the struggle of survival and death and on the other hand, has created the desire of reaching the heaven of spiritual pursuit. He has left behind many

incomplete works of the mundane world. But to make his incomplete work successful he provided full power to his son Maheswar Rajarshi Sri Guruchand Thakur and then disappeared. This has been recorded in the treatise Hari-Guruchand Charitrasudha. This treatise has mentioned a saying that was expressed by Sri Sri Harichand Thakur in a gathering that tells:

“Suno ohe bhoktigon sustho koro pran,
Tomader chere nohe jabo onno sthan.
Aar na kadio shobe sthir koro kay,
Guruchand dehe aami niyechi asroy.
Amasom Guruchande korio bhokti,
Shorbo dukkho jabe dure ghuchibe durdosha”.¹

Harichand Thakur believed in spirituality. The main theory of his initiation of Matua Philosophy or the path was self-purification through work. Thus he said, “Jibe doya name ruchi kormete nishtha”. He has stated on the increasing internal spirit of power through devotion towards work, love towards creatures and dedicated soul towards Hari or Lord Vishnu. Thakur said that if your body and mind are not well, devotion towards work would not come and love towards humanity is not possible. This is the reason for which at that time he started to have a dedicated soul towards Hari or Lord Vishnu. It is known from valuable poetic treatise like Sri Hari Leelamrita, Hari-Guruchand Charitrasudha, etc that through spiritual power he has performed several superhuman practices for all classes of society. These two great humans have offered respect towards Bengal's Dalits, Antyaja, exploited, disgraced, socially oppressed classes and also shown the path of getting cured of several diseases. During that time modern methods of treatment for curing diseases seemed to be rare to people. So, persons worn out of illness used to come to Harichand Thakur with the hope of healing of affliction. But he won't dishearten such persons. Sometimes with the help of mental treatment and again sometimes with the help of indigenous herbs or natural ways he used to recover such persons. The practice of medicine was not commonplace in the villages of East Bengal before the nineteenth century and the cities of Faridpur, Jessore, Barishal, Khulna, Mymensingh, Dhaka, Kolkata, etc. Diagnosis and pathological tests have not started with the help of different medical apparatus. Due to insufficient scientific-based modern diagnosis and place of diagnosis people used to go to the potent of spiritual power and the incarnation of the period, Sri Harichand Thakur with the urge of getting free from diseases. He used to say,

“Jodi rog mukti chao,
Je roger briddhi jate tai giye khao.
Teen sandha dhuli makho kirtaner khola,
Jor hole potthyo den tentuler ghola.
Bedona ojirno bomi kimba omlo pitte,
Tentul guliye khay pitoler patre.
Maha roge onge makhe gomoy gomutra,
Kehoba arogya pay prabhu aggya matro.”²

For a healthy livelihood of Matuas Sri Sri Harichand Thakur introduced twelve philosophies called ‘Dwadosh Aggya’ which made everyone to learn the realization of life and helped self-purification to happen. He has not used scientific-based modern treatment. But he has stated three systems of treatment of diseased people as **1)** increase in mental strength **2)** natural rules **3)** ways to prevent disease.³

1) According to Thakur, the key to remaining healthy and strong is to follow ‘Dwadosh Aggya’ and to control the sixth sense. Sri Harichand Thakur said,

“Deher indriyo bosh na hoyeche jar

Tirtho gele folprapti na hoyibe tanr
Deher indriyo bosh koreche je jon
Taar darshone shob tirtha darshon"⁴

Besides, through expressing the name of Hari or Lord Vishnu he used to tell the patients to toil which means to be a dedicated soul towards Hari and smearing dust of kirtan's khola on the entire body. This helped to increase mental strength and increased the power of the prevention of diseases. Thus, this is the reason for which he would give the provision of the patients to toil.⁵ Again many times to overcome the fear he used to gently touch the patient's body with his hand and with an incantation he used to put on a sacred thread on the patient's hand or the waist. All these helped him to increase his mental strength.

2) He stressed natural rules used natural things for the healing of diseases. According to Sri Thakur, which poison of nature leads to become unwell and to remove such poison, another fine amount of such kind of poison is required to be applied in the body which means toxic poisoning. These remedies can work for diseases if the proper selection is made for that kind of herbal or mineral-based food items related to water substance. As a result, man's lifeblood increases. He realized that the climate of the country is deeply connected with the natural herbs and medicinal plants. Fine herbal energy and fine lifeblood together work against the fine strong power of disease and the former defeat the latter and thus disease gets cured. Application of such serious thought and spiritual power has similarities with Dr. Hahnemann's policy of 'Samang Same Samayati'. This deep thought of Thakur has similarities with Homeopathic and Ayurvedic methods of treatment of the modern period.

3) Sri Harichand Thakur has beautifully explained the ways to prevent disease. But to explain this issue coordination of spiritual and human body is needed. In his philosophical thoughts, Sri Thakur has always talked about body-soul. With this how he explained the relation of disease prevention in the human body. According to him, Tumi mul ami sukkho ubhoye abhinna, Deho atma mora donhe muley noye bhinno.⁶ That means he has not observed body and soul separately. Body and soul are complementary to the other. There is no existence of body and soul separately. For ease of implementation christening of body and soul is done. It is better to say that conventional Hinduism's Ram, Sri Krishna, Gouranga Mahaprabhu, Jesus Christ, Hazrat Mohammad, Nanak, Mahavir, Persian religion and Judaism and pioneers of many other religions have separately viewed body and soul.⁷ Thakur explains that the 'soul' is one of the organs of the whole body. If the soul is destroyed the body is non-existent. So Thakur said, 'donhe' means two, 'mora donhe' means we are two strengths, 'mul nehi bhinna' means which was completely scientific and not separate. The modern interpretation of this issue is that there is no soul and this proof can be found through 'HEART OPERATION'. Superstitious people call 'HEART' as the soul which is named 'Hritpinda' in Bengali terminology. Modern treatment of this HEART is done. If successful life gets donated and if unsuccessful it is titled as death. Again although this HEART is donated to others, many lives are protected. Thus, it is proven in modern interpretation and information that HEART or soul can be touched and knives-scissors can be run on top of it. Therefore, the soul or 'HEART' is under the doctor's hands. A great specialist and doctor of this HEART were Sri Harichand Thakur. Because with the emphasis he said,

Griha Dharme su-adarsha sob deya holo,
Dehogrihe shuchikarojjo jeebe ki bujhilo?
Dehomon nohe shuchi griha karma kore,
Chidrojukto toree somo dube je sagare.
Dehomon sorbokhon rakhite pobitro,
Sikhayite hobe jeebe seyi mulsutro.⁸

Sri Harichand Thakur has emphasized the pure and disease-free body by rejecting every kind of adulterous happiness of the senses. He also stated that through dedication character should be kept pure so that disease cannot enter into the body. It is possible to keep the body healthy if you can control the shararipu present in the body. In the language of a poem, it can be said---

Deho mon sorbokhon rakhite pobitro,
Sikhayite hobe jeebe seyi mul sutro.
Tuliya namer dheyu prem plabonete,
Dhuye muche nibo sob naam probahote.⁹

He used to turn the course of mind by awakening the source of divine power and bring back previous normal conditions. Sri Harichand Thakur used some astonishing points to see a patient. He used to notice the metallic defect, hereditary history, specialty characters, natural and mental reasons. As medicine he prescribed gomoy for skin disease, tamarind mixed water for acidity and bile problem, mixing salt or the juice of the leaves of night-flowering jasmine with boiling tamarind leaves for cough, cold, fever and non-stop fever during change, fermented rice- salt-raw chili for diarrhea and cholera and with that he used to tell to have boiled water; what was used for dehydration is D.R.S in the modern name. For the increase of liver, he used to tell to have the juice of raw papaya with batasha. He advised to have the juice of the leaves of green chiretta, heart-leaved moonseed and sattu for liver pain and increase of liver spleen in malaria; again for cough juice of the leaves of white and blood bask; for spleen and edema diseases the juice of the ghosle leaves; to destroy the worms the juice of the neem leaves; the juice of red venna as an antidote for blood dysentery, measles and smallpox; for white dysentery the juice of jam leaves; for night blindness castrated liver; he used to tell to have sushni spinach and water spinach and also Brahmi leaves on the nose as medicine for epilepsy patients.¹⁰ On the other he advised for milk and other nutritious food for mother and child nutrition and their wellness; for an increase in breast milk he advised to have water spinach; for obstructive pain and menstrual cramps, he prescribed to have Indian Hemp leaves and juice of the roots. So he told about cow rearing in every house. He used to increase the stamina of mental patients and make them healthy and also make them rollicking chanting the name of Hari. Kapil Biswas has provided historical importance to the issue while highlighting his personal experience. He stated that following the instructions of Sri Thakur his grandmother Smt. Sumati Biswas used to blow thunder sounds and prescribed medicines and the above medicines on the instructions of Thakur to cure diseases. My father Dr. Upendranath Biswas on the instructions of grandmother used to prescribe the said medicines to heal the disease of the patients.

Sri Harichand Thakur his worthy son Sri Guruchand Thakur used to give provision of methods at different times for curing of diseases. Many times his good words that he spoke to make the disease go away. Sriman Vishnupada Bagchi has got the provision of methods for various diseases from Srimat Nabakumar Ray Thakur and he has recorded those. Srimat Nabakumar Ray Thakur took care of Srimat Guruchand Thakur for sixteen years.¹¹ Discussing some examples of those diseases on whom Sri Guruchand Thakur used to make for the curing of methods. Like when measles occurs among children there was the provision of smearing sesame oil. Again for older persons, it was told to anoint raw turmeric with neem leaf paste in the morning and evening. There was provision for having whey, raw yogurt and raw milk. The medicine for normal dysentery was to burn bel fruit or quince and have this with sugar or whey and to eat rice by burning banana blossom with mustard paste. Medicines prescribed for cholera were mold boiled rice, old vermilion, raw pepper and having rice with raw pepper and light green mango chutney. Also, there was the provision of eating green coconut, water chestnut, lotus goji, shells of palm seed. For Asthma there was the provision of having a bath in the morning and then eating together Sabri banana with old old tamarind, drinking raw milk and smearing ginger-mustard oil in the body. Medicines prescribed for

venereal diseases were to eat soak moong dal in sesame seeds and then peel a squash, grate it and eat it with sugarcane molasses in the morning, drinking curd milk in the early morning, applying leprosy leaf juice or telakchur leaf juice on the palm of the head. In the case of cancer, there was the provision of having the juice of the paste of Helencha roots, if it is in the throat eat raw milk and if it is outside the throat burnt soil, tamarind and salt should be mixed and to be applied. The medicines used for tetanus or epilepsy were 5-7 raw pepper or having pasted pepper mixed with water, also, it has been said to give pasted tamarind bandage or leprosy leaves with sesame oil. Nabakumar Ray Thakur has recorded that Sri Guruchand Thakur used to give rules and provisions for these different kinds of diseases.¹² But one thing is very important that to cure these diseases it needs to be syntactic and complete with spiritual power like Sri Harichand and Sri Guruchand Thakur.

In Matua's philosophy, there was no system of treatment relying on modern science. But the main approach of Sri Thakur's conventional treatment was spiritual thinking, immense belief and respect towards Thakur and self-confidence on your own. There is proof after the demise of Sri Hari-Thakur to remember him and his ideas for the welfare of the people of the mundane world some devotee-saint initiated Mahabaruni fair. Saint Srimat Ramchand Gosai, Sri Kalu Thakur, Sri Nabin Basu and Sri Raicharan Gosai in Bengali 1284 after the death of Harichand Thakur with the assistance of Sri Guruchand Thakur started this endeavour of Mahabaruni on the occasion of the birthday of Sri Thakur in modern Bangladesh's Orakandi. Srimat Bicharan Pagol has written,—

Prabhur jonmo—tini je dinette hay,
Baruni mela milabo boley bhechi hriday.
Sei din sobe mora ekotro hoyibo,
Prabhukay smoriye mora ananda koribo.
Sri Harichander jonmo-utsab hoyibay,
Srimahabaruni boley nam byakhya hobay.¹³

The main objective of this Baruni fair was to increase mind power by causing spirituality in the minds of Bengali people and by remembering Thakur flood his ideals. In this time of Mahabaruni Sri Guruchand Thakur created the Sea of Desire for holy bath. The main objective of this was that devotees in the name of the incarnation of the period Sri Harichand Thakur would bathe and pray for the welfare of his own, family, society and all in the name of the country and increase his mental strength. As a result, his healthy and long life will be formed. This great objective of Sri Thakur is rare in this world. The chief medicine for the people to be freed from disease is an increase in mental strength which he has been able to do by organizing lakhs and lakhs of people in one place. There is no greater medical system in the world. So Sri Guruchand Thakur has said

Mo togoney joto hoy bhabasrito,
Snan korey sei neere.
Jeba snan kore kamona sagare,
Koti kul pabe mukti.
Sejole dubite premananda chite,
Jeba kore taar bhakti.¹⁴

He has developed the mental and physical ability and provided luminaire of healthy living life by entering into people's minds of various Matua Gosai like Hirammon Pagol, Mrityunjoy Gosai, Sri Lochan Gosai, Brojonath Gosai, Sri Golok Pagol, Sri Dasharath Pagol, Viswanath Gosai, Natu Pagol, etc. prominent persons.

Following the path shown by Sri Hari-Guruchand Thakur various saints from the nineteenth –twentieth century till the present has been doing tireless hard work for the welfare of people and getting them relief from diseases. In recent times several Matua saints are applying the method of treatment of Sri Thakur. Some information given by them has been mentioned. Matua devotee Kamal Krishna Dhali has said, “Jodi kono byakti kono bhabe bhoy pay taholey ami takey ekti mantra uccharoner madhyome bhoy nibaroner chesta kori ebong saat ronger saat prokar suto porey deyi ebong oi byaktir haate ba komore saat din bedhe rakte boli. Ei mantra Sri Sri Guruchand Thakurer kach theke labh korechilen Matua sadhak Faru Bala jini chilen amar thakurmar baba ebong ami peyechi amar thakurmar kach theke”.¹⁵ He describes the main objective of this is to increase the mental courage of patients. In the language of modern science this is called ‘Counselling’. Sri Dhali also said, if eyes are red, irritation of eyes or if tears fall from the eyes, then through some mantra and then brushing can be freed from diseases.¹⁶ All the methods of treatment have been applied by K.K, Dhali following the path shown by Sri Hari-Guruchand Thakur. Another Matua devotee Sri Krishnapada Ray said the big strength of Matua is self-power, self-confidence, honesty and some policies and paths for moving in the mundane world that is influenced through Thakur.¹⁷ He is trying to cure diseases through the medicines given before by Sri Guruchand Thakur. Devotional Matua saint Srimat Baba Bapi Gosai while expressing his feelings has said,

Bhoktee muktir srestho path,
Soda sorboda name premey matoyara seyi matua hoy.
Satya, prem, pabitrata meynay cholbay tinti kotha,
Matuader ei sorto roy.¹⁸

Sri Bapi Gosai has said as an example, a devotee named Dasharath Bairagi once became very ill with fever. At last, after coming to Thakur as medicine he said,

‘kolyo bhat rakheche jol diya,
Kancha jhal diye seyi bhat khao giye’.¹⁹

This rice of Shanti Mata was in the pot, after feeding this rice to Dasharath Bairagi he became free from disease. Then onwards, he became a very big Hari devotee. Sri Bapi Gosai also said, ‘devotion’ is the only provider of curing the disease of Sri Thakur. In recent times, in Sri Hari Yugdisha magazine a list has been published about the removal of disease given before by Sri Hari-Guruchand like blood sugar and diabetes will not occur by taking neem leaves, young banana leaves, pepper, 5 grams of methi and making a powder and then having this in the morning and evening with little water for a month.²⁰

In the present time, traditional medicines are not only used by the rural masses for their primary health care in developing countries but are also used in developed countries where modern medicines dominate.²¹ More than 1500 herbals are sold as dietary supplements or ethnic traditional medicines.²² Hence, when there was no introduction to the modern medical system then the spiritual and devotional philosophy of Hari-Guruchand Thakur has shown people the way of liberation. The modern form of these medicines of Sri HariGuruchand Thakur is Ayurvedic treatment.

References:

1. Srimat Bicharan Pagol, Hari-Guruchand Charitrasudha, first publication- Bengali 1351, Taltala, Faridpur, Bangladesh, p.53,
2. Tarak Chandra Sarkar, Sri Sri Hari Leelamrita, published by Sri Krishna Thakur, Thakurnagar, ninth publication 2013, p.86.
3. Editor- Kapil Krishna Thakur, Sri Harichand Thakur O Matua Dharma Andolan , Dwishoto jonmobarsho smarak grantha, Bharat-Bangladesh joutho proyash, Nikhil Bharat Prakashani, Birendrabhavan Hridaypur Kolkata, first publication, 2012, p. 272.
4. Tarak Chandra Sarkar, Sri Sri Hari Leelamrita, Sridham, Orakandi, Bangladesh, first edition, p.-04).
Editor- Kapil Krishna Thakur, Sri Harichand Thakur O Matua Dharma Andolan , Dwishoto jonmobarsho smarak grantha, Bharat-Bangladesh joutho proyash, Nikhil Bharat Prakashani, Birendrabhavan Hridaypur Kolkata, first publication, 2012, p. 272.
6. Tarak Chandra Sarkar, Sri Sri Hari Leelamrita, Sridham Orakandi, Bangladesh, First edition, p. 73)
7. Pradip Kumar Biswas, Harichand Thakurer Sanskar O Samyobadi Darshan, Hari-Guruchand Prakashani, Bagda, North 24 Parganas, second publication, 2019, p. 67,
8. Tarak Chandra Sarkar, Sri Sri Hari Leelamrita, Sridham Orakandi, Bangladesh, first edition, p.73, Pradip Kumar Biswas, Harichand Thakurer Sanskar O Samyabodi Darshan, Hari-Guruchand Prakashani, Bagda, North 24 Parganas, second publication, 2019, p. 69.
9. Editor- Kapil Krishna Thakur, Sri Harichand Thakur O Matua Dharma Andolan , Dwishoto jonmobarsho smarak grantha, Bharat-Bangladesh joutho proyash, Nikhil Bharat Prakashani, Birendrabhavan Hridaypur Kolkata, first publication, 2012, p. 272.
10. Editor- Kapil Krishna Thakur, Sri Harichand Thakur O Matua Dharma Andolan , Dwishoto jonmobarsho smarak grantha, Bharat-Bangladesh joutho proyash, Nikhil Bharat Prakashani, Birendrabhavan Hridaypur Kolkata, first publication, 2012, pp. 272-73.
11. Vishnupada Bagchi, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur O somosamoyik bhakta charita, first publication Bengali-1424, United Printers, Ahsan Ahmed Road, Khulna, Bangladesh, P--136,
12. Vishnupada Bagchi, Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur O somosamoyik bhakta charita, first publication Bengali-1424, United Printers, Ahsan Ahmed Road, Khulna, Bangladesh, pp. 137-146,
13. Srimat Bicharan Pagol Sri Sri HariGuruchand charitra sudha, first publication- Bengali obdo-1351, Taltala, Faridpur, Bangladesh, current edition Bengali 1404, Sridham Thakurnagar, North 24 Parganas, pp. 78-79,
14. Srimat Bicharan Pagol Sri Sri HariGuruchand Charitra Sudha, first publication- Bengali 1351, Taltala, Faridpur, Bangladesh, current edition Bengali 1404, Sridham Thakurnagar, North 24 Parganas, pp. 83-84,
15. Won voice of Matua devotee Kamal Krishna Dhali
16. Won voice of Matua devotee Kamal Krishna Dhali
17. Won voice of Matua devotee Sri Krishnapada Roy
18. Own opinion of Devotional Matua saint Srimat Baba Bapi Gosai,
19. Srimat Tarak Chandra Sarkar, Sri Sri HariLeelamrita, first edition, Orakandi, Bangladesh, p- 84,
20. Sri Hari Yugdisha magazine, issue 35, January-March, 2019,
21. B. Ballabh and O. P. Chaurasia, "Traditional medicinal plants of cold desert Ladakh-Used in treatment of cold, cough and fever," *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, vol. 112, no. 2, pp. 341-345, 2007,
22. B. Patwardhan, D. Warude, P. Pushpangadan, and N. Bhatt, "Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine: a comparative overview," *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 465-473, 2005.