

Safeguarding Traditional Healing Systems Udaipur, Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT

Traditional health healing systems are a form of intangible cultural heritage that encompasses the age-old treatments and therapies known to cure human diseases. These are passed on from one generation to another, within a community, through interactions and observations. Recognising the need of conserve this traditional knowledge for safeguarding the ecosystem, JJVS is working to promote gunis, focusing on trainings, interaction meets and patients' treatment, thereby strengthening the traditional ways of cure and heal, through sustainable means. The organisation works in the rural areas of Udaipur District in Rajasthan, India.

INTRODUCTION

Certain tribal communities residing in forest areas of India possess and practice traditional healing systems to treat human health problems and diseases. These are passed on from generation to generation within a community, and to outsiders through interactions and observations. This traditional knowledge encompasses a set of practices that are largely associated with conservation of inherited bio-cultural diversity, a sub-network of the ecosystem. This highlights the interaction between human beings and floral diversity. A traditional healer is known as *vaidya*, *vaidhyaraj*, *amchi*, *gaita*, *uche* and *danga bhagat* in various part of India.

Ganesh Purohit, born and brought up in Chandwas Village in Udaipur, is the founder and director of Jagran Jann Vikas Samiti (JJVS). Ganesh's desire to know the world outside his village brought him to the city, from where he completed his master's degree in Political Science from University of Udaipur. He founded JJVS in 1985 and currently works in liaising, administration, planning and other public activities in the organisation.

In Rajasthan, local practitioners who cure patients through such traditional knowledge dwell in interior rural areas and are known as *gunis*¹. Marginalised communities dwelling in interior rural areas cannot afford expensive medicines provided by formal doctors. Even during the outbreak of epidemics, people cannot afford expensive treatments and do not have access to medical facilities. Being unaware of the symptoms of such diseases, many people end up losing their life. Under these circumstances, the role of *gunis* is considered essential in dealing with the diseases without much expense. Medical formulations prepared from plants by them consists of essential natural compounds that are vital for human health.

Rural communities in Rajasthan have been neglected and denied their rightful share of societal resources over the last few centuries. A group of enthusiastic individuals viewed and analysed the poor socio-economic status of tribal groups in southern Rajasthan and established Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti (JJVS), a non-government organisation in Udaipur District of Rajasthan, India. JJVS was set up in 1985 with the objective of bringing about social change in the tribal communities and conserving the traditional knowledge system as well as the ecosystem. JJVS enables people recognising their potentials and developing their skills, making alive the traditional health practices, preserving the natural resources and promoting sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Since its inception, the organisation worked in areas of rural infrastructure, environment development activities and capacity enhancement, with a focus on the traditional health systems. A mainstay of JJVS's work is the identification of health traditions, organising training sessions, facilitating interactions and networking of *gunis* and documentation and streamlining of their practices. JJVS has contributed towards institutionalising the practices of *gunis* through *guni ashrams* (hermitage) and Guni Training cum Treatment Centres (GTTC), so that these traditional healers may enhance their knowledge and skills to serve the communities, thereby strengthening the traditional knowledge. It is working intensively in Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Dungarpur, Banswara, Jodhpur and Sirohi Districts of Rajasthan and extensively working in other parts of India with support of national networks and supporting agencies. The core activities of the institute are executed in Udaipur, Gogunda, Kotra, Girwa, Jhadol, Sarada, Lasadiya, Kherwara, Khurabar and Salumbar blocks.

CHARTING THE PROCESS

Guni Ashrams and Guni Training cum Treatment Centres

JJVS encouraged formation of home-based clinics in the residences of *gunis*. The first one was set up as a pilot in JJVS's office in Vali, a small village 50 kilometres from Udaipur city. It was a decentralised institutional model for approaching *gunis* to mobilise their health services and build their capacity. This *guni ashram* consists of a health clinic conjoined with interaction place in a 15.34 metres x 9.14 metres area. It provides health services to the rural population living in its proximity and acts as a platform to enhance practical knowledge and skills through education and knowledge exchange on medicinal formulations and plants cultivation, thereby revitalising traditional knowledge.

At present, there are 125 home based clinics functional in 125 villages in Kurabar, Sarada, Gogunda, Jhadol and Girwa blocks in Udaipur District. Around 150 female and 350 male *gunis* were identified in 200 villages and approximately 75,000 women, 150,000 men and 25,000 children have received treatment through these home-based clinics. Traditional treatment is easily



Guni Training cum Treatment Centre in Karakali Village, Udaipur District



Eco-hut set up at JJVS's Bhutiya office

afforded by the rural population, with average cost of ₹100 in comparison to ₹1000 in an urban setup. Except extremely severe cases, hardly any patient is being referred to city hospitals. Cases of arthritis, diabetes, leucorrhoea, blood disorders, cough, loose motions, kidney stone, pneumonia, fever and eczema are easily treated at the doorstep. Extreme cases like uterus prolepses and bone dislocation are also being handled well by experienced *gunis*.

In 2014, JJVS expanded the *ashram* model in the form of GTTC. This is a centralised institutional model representing the closely associated villages. Two GTTC's were established by JJVS in Vela and Karakali in Udaipur District, with the support of multilateral donors, state government and *gunis*.

In order to impart education and preserve the knowledge of *guni* healers, eco- huts were set up by three volunteers from United States of America in 2016. The first eco- hut was established in Bhutiya office of JJVS in Kurabar block.

Documentation and Research

Traditional knowledge of *gunis* has been documented in Community Health Knowledge Registers (CHKR). Treatment of 38 types of diseases with different formulations have been described in this CHKR. Evidences of such formulations have also been found in historical documents like Charak Samhita, Bhavaprakash Nighantu, Ashtanga Hridaya Samhita and Sarangdhar Samhita². CHKR is being referred by both *gunis* and Ayurveda doctors for treatment of diseases. 38 *guni* formulations have been authorised by a group of specialised Ayurvedic doctors through rapid tests, where the evidence of formulations is traced back in these historical texts. The testing is performed after the prior consent of the *gunis*.

31 new formulations have been discovered by *gunis*. Pratapi powder, diabetes powder, cough syrup, arthritis syrup, skin disorder oil, kidney stone mixture and leucorrhoea powder are some of the new formulation prepared from indigenous plants. Around 183,000 patients have been treated with such formulations.

Livelihood Generation

With value addition in the practice of *gunis*, it is emerging as a new source of livelihood. A *guni* attends to around 175 patients per month and the fee of cost practice generates an average monthly income of ₹ 8000. This charge excludes the consultation time. The income gained is boosting the main livelihoods of agriculture and animal husbandry, enabling spending on food, shelter and education.

The *gunis* have identified 311 indigenous herbal plants in forests, commons and on government land, while 18 species have been conserved by them through sustainable harvesting³. 30 hectares of private land and six hectares of commons have been designated for ex-situ and in-situ conservation of herbal plants respectively in the form of home herbal gardens known by the name of Dharam Bagichi⁴ and Community Conserved Area (CCA). The area is managed by the local community, organised in the form of temple committees. *Gunis* also learn cultivation techniques like sowing, harvesting, storage and propagation, that promotes good agricultural practices. Conservation efforts have increased opportunities for accessing herbal plants and are attracting the new generation towards adopting the *guni* culture.

Training and Platforms for Interaction

A network of *gunis* has been created by organising interactive meets, enabling learning from peers and doctors. Trainings on Panchakarma⁵, Naturopathy⁶, Aadithery⁷ and Myotherapy⁸ have supplemented *guni* knowledge, proving helpful in dealing with chronic diseases and body aches. Collectively 92 villages, districts, national and international *guni* interactive meets were organised in Vali and Bhutiya village *guni ashrams*, located at JJVS offices and *guni* houses,



Guni treating the patient at one of the GTTC



Guni treating the patient by Myotherapy

in which 1344 *gunis* participated. Interactions were helpful in sharing medicinal formulations and therapies, thereby strengthening the global biocultural diversity.

Overall, 198 village level, national and international training programmes were organised in *guni ashrams* and GTTCs, in which 6336 *gunis* participated. They learnt disease symptoms, advance therapies, preparation and preservation of herbal formulations; and identification and cultivation of herbal plants from botanists, doctors and scholars. The *gunis* were given certificates of appreciation during the training programmes, which further motivated them.

Dissemination

Gunis are educating practitioners and non-practitioners through informal approaches. In the villages, people are made aware through religious gatherings. Men and women Self Help Groups (SHG) are also actively promoting the traditional knowledge by passing on the propagules of herbal plants. Scholars from Ayurveda universities also get learning experience from *gunis*. Health camps are an important means for outreach of *gunis*. 84,480 people attended camps in cities in India, spreading the use of traditional herbal health remedies along with establishing the identity of *gunis*. To promote outreach, 384 health camps have been organised till date in Delhi and Udaipur, in collaboration with Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH), Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, Government of India; State Forest Department, Adivasi Sangthan of Guni, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force and other Non-Government Organisations, in which 61,440 people have been treated.

Books titled ‘Guni Gyan’, ‘Guni Darshan’ and ‘Dai Khazana’ and user guides have been published in consultation with the *gunis* to generate awareness in the local community on traditional practices. User guides are helping the community in preparing home based herbal medicines and developing their personal home herbal gardens. 13,000 Dharam Bagichis have been developed in order to cultivate indigenous plants species that can be used for the treatment of common diseases. Unirrigated patches of land are used to plant at least 14 species of herbal plants by each household. To ensure continuous supply of the plants, a mother nursery was developed at the *guni ashram* located at Bhutiya Village, Kurabar block, Udaipur.

SUMMING UP

Right from the onset, JJVS has been people centric, addressing aspirations of the people, ranging from managing local resources and knowledge, to issues of their livelihood with conservation concerns of biological resources. Today, the organisation operates in 10 blocks of Udaipur and its neighbourhood districts for development activities.

JJVS conducts Global Community Health Exchange

Programmes and will be hosting 55 international volunteers, including four supervisors, providing opportunities to the *gunis* also to learn from the international healers and vice versa. This also aids in providing a livelihood opportunity to the young generation of traditional healers. Future prospects of JJVS include intense immunisation programmes to target child health issues. It is planning to link with CSRs for local resource mobilisation and expand its international and national voluntary internship programmes for further revenue generation.

With a vision of an egalitarian social order, where basic needs are fulfilled, economic inequalities are minimised and where democratic decision- making provides for the common good, it is important to sustain the ability of the organisation, along with maintaining its objective with wider knowledge sharing and exposure.

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Notes

- ¹ The word *guni* is a Hindi term that means knowledge possessor.
- ² Important books on Ayurvedic knowledge.
- ³ These include *Commiphora wightii*, *Tinospora cordifolia*, *Enicostema spp.*, *Abrus precatorius*, *Aegle marmelos*, *Asparagus racemosus*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Celastrus paniculata*, *Chlorophytum spp.*, *Dolichos biflorus*, *Helicteris isora*, *Holarhena antidysenterica*, *Justicia adhatoda*, *Solanum xanthocarpum*, *Vitex*

negundo, *Chlorophytum borivillianum*, *Tribulus terrestris*, *Pongamia pinnata*.

- ⁴ Literally means gardens of selflessness service.
- ⁵ *Panchakarma* is a process of cleaning the body of toxic materials left by disease, poor nutrition and environmental toxins.
- ⁶ Naturopathy is an ancient and traditional system to cure of diseases without using medicines, integrating physical, mental and spiritual aspects of natural constitution.

- ⁷ Aaditherapy addresses problems like musculoskeletal among elderly people and other problems like arthritis, kyphosis and spondylitis among older people. The term is derived from the Sanskrit word *aadi*, meaning ancient of indigenous. It combines therapies used by traditional healers that have been passed down from generation to generation.
- ⁸ Myotherapy is a type of physical therapy used for treatment and prevention of soft tissue pain and restricted joint movement.