

Chapter I

BARAK VALLEY AND HEALTH CULTURE

This chapter deals with the health culture in Barak valley. Attempt has been made to locate the hepatitis and the gallbladder stone problems in the cultural milieu. After providing the theoretical perspective of the health culture in general, a brief account of the Barak valley is also given. Later, the holistic culture of the valley in general and health culture in particular are described. Within this health culture of the Barak Valley, the problems of hepatitis and gallbladder stone formation have been examined including the indigenous curative processes of these diseases.

The surface of the planet earth is variegated with culture which acts as a guiding force of tapestry of languages, religion, subsistence pattern, dress, lifestyle, family, marriage and health care. Culture plays an important role in determining the health status of an individual in course of life time; it is determined by the habits, beliefs, values etc. of the village folk connected with walking, sleeping, eating and drinking, working, defecation and so on. The culturally patterned behaviour co-relates with health in several ways and it may impose or promote disease in a community. An individual's health is not affected by culturally determined behaviour alone rather it entails the systems of beliefs and practices. People have distinct notions or beliefs regarding health and practices that affect on the day to day activities. Culturally patterned beliefs and practices that impinge upon health are collectively called as health culture. It can be defined as the ways of beliefs, customs and practices of a community in relation to health and diseases. Health culture is the aggregate of plurality of usages related to health practices. It can also be referred as perception, meaning of the diseases and the behaviour of the

people conducive to disease as well as consequent behaviour in response to health problems. It develops through interaction of people in their day to day activities while dealing with ill health. And in course of time they become embedded as part of life and hence developed as health culture. It is a combination of (a) cultural meaning of various health problems encountered by the community; (b) the response of the people to the health problems as manifested by the formation of various institutions; and (c) the overall health culture of the people (Sahu, 1991).

The term health culture has been adopted way back in 1961 by social scientists working in the field of tuberculosis. The study was oriented towards cultural meaning and perception of health problems, existence of institutions of folk medicines as well as various intervention programmes on family planning method undertaken by the government (ibid, 1991). Cultural system and disease endemic are co-related and differ both in time and in space. Since, cultural systems are not static and have been kept on changing from the original human civilization of hunting and gathering society to modern industrial states even at post modern society also. As Ruth Benedict has also observed that the normal behaviour has a wide range and is largely related to cultural environment (Benedict, 1953). A general pattern of cultural evolution have long been recognized by anthropologists from simple to complex societies and from long-energy to- high energy-harnessing economies (Shalins and Service 1960). Increased population size, explanations of technology, increased social inequality and greater transformation of the environment are the elements which earmarked the difference between simple and complex societies. Disease, ecology and epidemiological patterns are co-related with stages in cultural evolution as well, the total morbidity and mortality from disease is subject to ecological settings (Dunn, 1968).

ASSAM



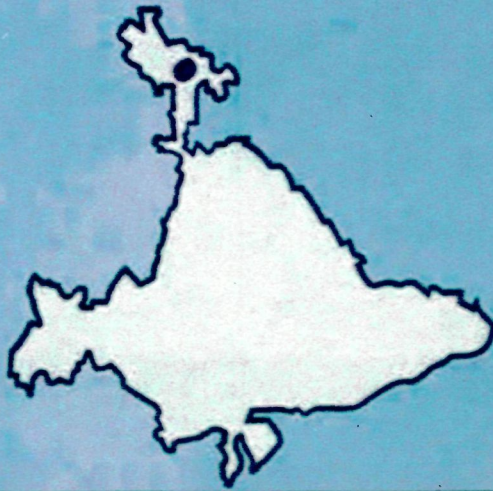
MAP-1 GEOGRAPHICAL MAP OF ASSAM
SHOWING BARAK VALLEY

BARAK VALLEY

CACHAR

HAILAKANDI

KARIMGANJ



MAP -2 1 GEOGRAPHICAL MAP OF BARAK VALLEY
SHOWING THREE DISTRICTS.

Surrounded by hillocks on three sides, Barak valley is located in the southern most part of Assam. It is bounded on the North by Barail and Jaintia hill range, on the south by Mizoram and on the East by the hills of Manipur and on the west neighboring country Bangladesh. The valley comprises three districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi and was under the jurisdiction of Cachar district till 1983 when Karimganj subdivision was separated and promoted as district. Cachar district was further fragmented with the formation of Hailakandi subdivision as district in 1989. Since Cachar district has been standing on the bank of river Barak, the valley popularly known as Barak Valley. Historically, the valley was known as Surma Valley because the two Bengali speaking districts Cachar and Sylhet were carved out of Bengal Province and incorporated in to the provinces of Assam under a commissionership in 1874 (Choudhury, 1982). Surma Valley came to be known as an extension of Ganga-Padma basin; because historical accounts insight that geographically the valley was open towards Bengal without having any natural boundary and connected by land and river that influence the valley socio-culturally as well as linguistically. During these days Bengal was pre-dominated by Indo-Aryan culture. Owing to geographical embracing of the Surma-Valley with Bengal, Indo Aryan Culture had extended up to this valley and intermingled with socio-cultural milieu of the people irrespective of Hindu and Muslims (ibid; 1982).

Dim-sighted historical evidence is an impediment to explore about early inhabitants. Yet historians presumed that Austric-speaking people are the early inhabitants of the Barak Valley. Nidhanpur copper plate of Bhaskar Barman was the first material evidence of socio-political organisation of the

valley. According to Nidhanpur inscription a part of the Barak valley was known as Chandpuri Vaishya in the late 5th or 6th century A.D and ruled by Brahma-Naraka rulers from Bhuti Barman to Bhaskar Barman. Other region of the valley was under the Samanta ruler as it was evidenced from Kalapur inscription of Marudhanatha in the late 7th or early 8th century A.D. Samanta chief of East Bengal constructed Bishnu temple near Bikrampur (ibid,1982).

Separate historical development of Surma-Barak valley started with the emergence of Cachar under Harikala ruler in the 10th century A.D. Harikala was ancient name of Sylhet; in the 10th century A.D. Srichandra of the renowned Chandra dynasty of East Bengal incorporated a major portion of the valley within the region. During this period Chandra Nath Math situated in the Panchakhanda region of the pre-partitioned Karimganj earned wide reputation as a centre of learning. The remaining portion centering on Silchar came under the influence of Pala Dynasty. Bhatar inscription of Govinda Keshabananda and Ishananda put forward incorporation of Srihatta Rajjya of which major part of Cachar Karimganj including Sylhet of present Bangladesh was incorporated. In the 14th century A.D. Sylhet district was conquered by Hajrat Shah Jalal and the region was brought under Bengal sultanate which was subsequently succeeded by Mughal emperor who organised Sylhet Sarkar that came under the British rule in 1765 with the grant of Diwani of Bengal to the East India Company. But Shahjalal did not extend his province beyond Badarpur. During that period most of the kingdom of Cachar came under the nominal control of Tripuri rule that was later on came under Naranarayana the Koch king. In December 1706, the Cachari king Thamradhaja defeated by Ahom king Rudra Singh and fled

away towards Khaspur. From this time onwards the Cachari king seems to have settled in the plains of Cachar, their court being located at Khaspur. The Cachari king Sudrapa Narayan set himself to recognize the people and improve the capital by brick built palaces and temples were created in different parts of Khaspur. It is said that the demoness Hirimba, whom the second Pancha Pandava married was residing in this place. Hence the kingdom was made Hirimba kingdom in the name of the demon. The first connection of British with district dates back to 1762 when Varlets marched from Chitagang to assist the Manipuri king Jay Singha, who had been driven from his throne by the Burmese. Mr. Varlets halted with his army at Jatrapur near present Silchar town. The army remained there for about a year and due to disease and death among the army Mr. Varlets could not proceed further and was ultimately recalled. In 1830 the district Cachar was created by the British when Cachari king Govinda Chandra was kidnapped and the province remained ruler less. Mr. T. Fisher an army officer was sent to take the charge with its district head quarter at Cherrapunji which was shifted to Dudhpatil in 1832. After independence Karimganj subdivision of Syllhet district was separated and incorporated with Cachar (ibid, 1982).

Socio-culturally, ever bondage of kinship between Cachar and Karimganj remain intact even during the days of disruption as it is implicated from the fact that Bengali was an administrative language during the Hirimba regime even though its capital was situated at Maibong. The royal house has also encouraged Bengalee settlement for economic development. Bengali language was also protected by the British when Cachar was trigged with Assam Government and the valley has been dominated by Bengali language

and Bengali culture since then. Eighty percent of the people in Barak Valley speaks in Bengali language.

Historians traced two causes associated with the name of Cachar. As Cachar was ruled by Cachari, the name Catcher was derived as land of Cachari. Secondly, the word Cachar in Sylhetty language means a stretch of land on the foot of hills and hence the name Cachar might have been given by Bengalee people of Sylhet as surrounded by mountains and river.

Physical features:

Barak Valley is situated within the $24^{\circ} 5'$ N north latitude and $92^{\circ} 51'$ Longitude having a total area of 6951 square kilometers. The main part of the land is made up of sand stone, shale, mud stone, siltstone, Ferruginous sand, layers of pebbles and clay formation. Physiographically, the valley shows some low hills areas with the elevation about 300 meter undulating plains with hillocks and narrow valleys, broad mender plains and some low lying depressions. Altitude of the valley rises approximately up to 1400 meter sea level (www.nic.cachar.ac.in, 2008).

Climate:

Being a part of tropical zone of South-East Asia, the valley exhibits monsoonal climate. Temperature is moderate ranging from 9.2°C to 3.6°C (www.nic.cachar.ac.in ,2008).

Communication:

Geographically, Cachar is not situated in an advantageous position but strategically, the district is important. It is situated about 300 kilometers from the state capital and connected by National Highway number 44. Cachar is the gateway to Mizoram and also to the western parts of Manipur and is surrounded

by hills in almost three sides. Cachar is connected by road with Guwahati via Jowai-Shillong. It is the only road link direct from Guwahati and linking the rest of the country. Cachar is also the gate way of Mizoram, Tripura and Manipur. The Jowai Badarpur road also connects Mizoram, Tripura and part of Manipur. The Silchar- Imphal road connects Cachar with Manipur via Lakhipur, Jiribam - Nongbah. The Silchar-- Haflong road connects Haflong, Lunding and other parts of Assam. The railway network established in early 1900.A.D. touching important places of the Barak Valley due to growth of Tea plantation. The Lunding-- Badarpur section of North-East Frontier railway is the most vital link of Cachar, Mizoram and Tripura with the rest of the country. The line was built up through the zigzag hilly terrain of North Cachar Hills passing through 36 tunnels with great engineering skill. Cachar District has its own Airport at Kumbhirgram which is approximately 30 kilometers away from Silchar town. This serves as the major air communication link point for the people of Barak Valley (www.nic.cachar.ac.in, 2008).

Total area of the Barak valley is approximately 6921 square kilometer. Cachar is the largest district in size followed by Karimganj and Hailakandi (www.nic.assam.ac.in 2008)

TABLE 1.1: DISTRICT WISE TOTAL AREA OF BARAK VALLEY.

District	Total Area
Cachar	3786 sq km
Karimganj.	1809 sq km
Hailakandi	1326.10 sq. km
Total	6921 sq .km.

TABLE 1.2: SEX WISE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION.

District	Male	Female	Total
Cachar	743042	701879	1444921
Karimganj	517680	490296	10007976
Hailakandi	280513	262359	542872
Total	1524135	1454534	2995769

Sex wise distribution of the population reveals the fact that male and female populations in Cachar district are all most equally distributed. The male population is higher than female in both Karimganj and Hailakandi districts (www.nic.assam.ac.in 2008).

TABLE 1.3: SCHEDULE CASTE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION.

Schedule caste	Cachar	Karimganj	Hailakandi	Total
Patni	78699	45482	27026	151207
Namasudra	44099	25613	12604	82316
Kaibartya	39823	23176	-----	62999
Muchi	-----	-----	5840	5840
Total	162621	94271	45470	302368

Patnies are dominant caste group followed by Kaibartya and Namasudra among the scheduled castes in Cachar and Karimganj district. Although Panties are dominant in Hailakandi district followed by Namasudras but the district is not having Kaibartya population. Quite a significant Muchi population inhabits Hailakandi district (www.nic.assam.ac.in 2008).

TABLE 1. 4: SCHEDULE TRIBE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION

Schedule Tribe	Cachar	Karimganj	Hailakandi	Total
Barman	10908	1838	733	13497
Cachari	6875	607	66	7214
Generic	499	339	-----	898
Bodo	-----	-----	10	10
Total	18282	2784	809	21619

Barmans are dominant schedule tribes in the entire district of Barak Valley followed by Cachari. Other important tribes such as Khasi, Kooki, Hmar are inhabiting different pockets of Cachar and Karimganj districts while only 10 members of Bodo are reported to have been living in Hailakandi district (www.nic.assam.ac.in 2008).

TABLE 1.5: AGE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION

District	0-4	5-14	15-49	>60	Total
Cachar	155307	361097	830268	98249	1444921
Karimganj	120430	268874	549498	69174	1007967
Hailakandi	68971	148309	292595	32997	542872
Total	344708	778280	1672721	200420	2995762

Age wise distribution reveals the fact that in all the districts of Barak valley, the population more than 60 years is the smallest in size compared to others. Majority of the population in all the districts is between 15 and 49 years of age followed by 5 years to 49 years and less than 5 years (www.nic.assam.ac.in 2008).

TABLE 1.6 : LITERACY LEVELS OF THE VALLEY.

District	Male	Female	Total
Cachar	474145	350295	824440
Karimganj	319205	230914	550119
Hailakandi	155674	107873	263547
Total	949024	689082	1638106

TABLE 1.7: LITERACY RATE OF THE VALLEY.

District	Male	Female	Total
Cachar	75.73	59.41	67.82
Karimganj	74.69	57.28	66.24
Hailakandi	68.24	50.46	59.64
Total	218.66	167.15	193.70

So far as table 1.2 and table 1.3 are concerned Cachar is ahead in both male and female literacy level as well as male and female literacy rate followed by Karimganj and Hailakandi respectively (www.nic.assam.ac.in 2008).

TABLE 1.8: NUMBER OF HOSPITALS IN THE VALLEY.

District	Hospitals	PHCs	Dispensaries	Rural Family welfare Planning Centres	Sub-centers	Total
Cachar	8	22	2	8	275	315
Karimganj	2	16	5	5	232	260
Hailakandi	2	8	2	4	112	128
Total	12	46	9	17	619	703

In Barak Valley there are 12 hospitals, 46 Primary Health Centers (P.H.Cs), 9 Dispensaries, 17 Rural Family Welfare Planning Centres and 619 Sub-centre under the supervision and control of the district Joint Director of Health Services Government of Assam. There is only one medical college in south Assam and is situated at Silchar, the district head quarter of Cachar district (www.nic.assam.ac.in 2008). In entire North- East India, Assam state has maximum health care providing institutions (Appendix -1).

Meaning Of Health.

Health is viewed as “*swastha*” which means a disease free body. Multifarious terms and ideas are associated with the term health. An individual who is capable of doing all the activities expected from a normal individual by society is called *sushtha* (healthy) person meaning a disease free individual. Individual’s capability includes both physical and mental conditions. The term health is viewed by a constellation of ideas and action. The corporal interpretation of health implicates a fatty individual as healthy and a thin individual despite having a disease free body is considered as unhealthy. But the interpretation on the basis of action and function of body is separate. On the basis of physical function digestion is assumed as the most important sign of health in Barak Valley. A person who has good appetite and can digest all that he or she takes is considered as healthy. In other words, the term health is attributed to work ability of an individual that would lead a person to work without any hindrance and would let that person to perform all the duties as expected from him, such as role of a husband or wife, brother or sister and son or daughter satisfactorily. The presence of pain, discomfort and apathy to work, feeling of idleness are generally undesirable from healthy individual.

There is a broad distinction between health and illness. Health is a holistic concept and disease is just an element that causes malfunction in the homeostatic balance of body and thereby affects health. Owing to uncertainty on individual’s age and sex, individual’s perception on health as well as response and recognition of signs of illness are considered as uncertain also. And the quality of illness and its implications may differ correspondingly.

Health as Resilience:

Treatment of an affliction and use of prophylactic means are the ways to achieve good health. In Barak valley prophylaxis and medication in ailment are followed through different institutions of health: (i) Health institutions formed internally within the community, (ii) through the process of cultural diffusion. the community seeks help of health institutions (Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP), drug seller, homoeopathy physicians) outside their own culture. Besides these two, there are purposive interventions from outside in the form of specific institutions (Primary Health Centre, Dispensaries, and Hospitals etc.). Healers (*kaviraj*) and non-trained midwives (*dhatiri or dhari*) are two pantheon centre around the community. *Kaviraj* is considered as divinely gifted. Good health is nurtured through the day to day behavior and healthy practices are lie on the rear of people's way of life. Treatment is followed from the performance of protective rituals. Performance of rituals and religious activities set up even before the birth of an individual. Peoples' way of life and day to day behaviour implicates the prevention for health and disease. The process can be observed from the very beginning of a person's life. As infants and mothers are kept isolated in a separate room "*Atur ghar*" and restrictions are put on the entry to that room and touching the baby without touching fire in order to avoid any kind of infection as infants are more prone to get infected by virus. Reason behind the idea of touching the fire before touching the baby is that fire destroys all kinds of germ. Mother is kept as afflicted which on the other way gives the patient rest. Puberty women are prohibited to work, to move here and there and kept under control to avoid any kind of menstruation disorder as the body remains weak during these days. Married

women are to maintain distance from her husband and to sleep in the floor to retain cleanliness and avoid sexual inclination. First and foremost task carried out in a day is to clean the courtyard (*uthan*) with cow dung and water with the belief that courtyard is afflicted by evil spirit, evil air and animal like fox and dog, since they use to walk over court yard at night. Women are to change clothes in the morning before they enter into the kitchen. Concept of pollution and purity is observed in all types of activities. Cow dung and holy basil are considered as the purest things that can refer purity. Cow dung (*gøbor*) and holy basil (*tulsi*) are used to clean the floor (*mejhe*) and earthen oven (*chullah*) to maintain purity. Every last day of the every Bengali month is observed as *Sankranti*. On the day of *Sankranti* all the kitchen materials including containers of goods, napkins even the kitchen itself are to be clean properly. Before *chaitra-sankranti*, *Magh-sankranti* and *Bhadra-sankranti* not only the kitchen materials but all the household materials like cloth, bedcovers, bed sheets etc., also have to be washed off. All belongings of the home are to be cleaned properly including ceiling, door and windows of the home.

Food habit and food taboo:

The purpose of exploring dietary pattern is to provide qualitative information on the kinds of foods consumed, the frequency of these foods appear in the diet. the sources of supply, method of storing, preparing and cooking. It also deals with the problem of nutritions, customs and practices, values and idea and the economy of the people of Barak Valley.

In Barak Valley there are three sources of food supply: Own field, village shop and market. People in general hails from both urban and rural areas get depend on village shops and market for food supply; but a tiny proportion of villagers who have own cultivable land get food stuff from their own land. Rice is

the principal food in Barak valley followed by pulses and fish. Various types of common pulses are *lentils, greengram, arhar, field pea and pigeon pea*. Of all, lentil is popularly prevalent. It is a compulsory item in daily meal. Many people are reported to take lentils (*musur dal*) even twice. Lentil occupies primary position in the list of daily food item and cut across the society. On occasion, tradition is not to serve lentil rather mug or gram amongst the upper caste. Lentil is prepared among the upper caste people. In Bengalee Hindu custom, lentil is regarded as non vegetarian food stuff and mug and gram are regarded as vegetarian food. Thus lentil is prohibited for widows. It is also prohibited in those special days in which vegetarianism is customary to observe. Nevertheless, lentil is a common food item it is accorded lower status in the festival food. In festival food prevalent practice is to prepare mug and gram among the upper caste of people while preparation of lentil is attributed to lower caste people. Thus it appears, social stratification is significant in the food habits of people in Barak Valley. The characteristic features of dietary patterns are that various types of vegetables are taken seasonally which gives a variation in the food habit of the people in different seasons of the year. Various types of foods available in Barak Valley are given below:

TABLE 1.9 : LIST OF FOOD MATERIALS AVAILABLE IN BARAK VALLEY.

Local name	English name	Botanical name/Scientific name	When available
Pulses:			
Chana	Gram	<i>Cicer arietinum</i>	Throughout the year.
Urd	----	<i>Phaseolus mungo</i>	Do
Mung	-----	<i>Phaseolus radius</i>	Do
Matar	Field pea	<i>Pisum sativum</i>	Do
Arhar	Pigeon pea	<i>Cajanus indicus</i>	Do
Vegetables:			April-June\July

Danga	Green pigweed	<i>Amaranthus viridis</i>	Do
Lal shak	Chinese spinach	<i>Amaranthus tricolor</i>	Throughout year
Thankuni	Centella	<i>Centella asiatica</i>	Do
Helencha	Water Cress	<i>Enhydra fluctuans</i>	Do
Lettuce	-----	<i>Lactuca sativa</i>	November-Feb\March
Laishak	Brown mustard	<i>Brasica juncea</i>	Do
Badhakopi	Cabbage	<i>Brassica oleracea var. capitata</i>	April-September
Phulkopi	Cauliflower	<i>Brassica oleracea var. botrytis</i>	
Chal Kumra	Wax Gourd	<i>Beniacasa hispida</i>	September/October
Potol	Pointed Ground	<i>Trichosanthes dioica</i>	Throughout the yea
Sasha	Cucumber	<i>Cucumis sativus</i>	Throughout the year
Tita Karala	Bitter Gourd	<i>Momordica charantia</i>	March-June.
Pani Lau	Bottle Gourd	<i>Lagenaria sicearia</i>	Dec-February
Mistikumra	Gourd	<i>Cucurbita maxima</i>	Do
Misti Alu	Sweet potato	<i>Ipomoea batatus</i>	Throughout the year
Pepe	Papaya -	<i>Carica papaya</i>	Throughout the year
Bokful	Legume	<i>Sesbania grandiflora</i>	Throughout the year
Kachu	Arum	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	July-September
Fruits: Some of the fruits grown in Barak Valley			
Kathal	Jack fruit	<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i>	April-July
Bel	Wood apple	<i>Aegle marmelos</i>	Feb\March/April\May
Bhubi	Lotkon	<i>Baccurea sapiola</i>	June-August
Kagoji Lebu	Lime	<i>Citrus grandis</i>	Throughout the year
Batapi Lebu	Citrus	<i>C. latipes</i>	August-October
Satkora	Citrus	<i>C. limon</i>	Throughout the year
Lebu	Lemon	<i>C. medica</i>	Do
Amloki	Embelic Myrobalan	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i>	February-April
Aam	Mango	<i>Magnifera indica.</i>	May-August
Amra	----	<i>Spondius pinnata</i>	January-April

Tetul	Temarind	<i>Tamarindus indica</i>	March-April
Payera	Guava	<i>Pisidium guajava</i>	June-July
Kalajam	Blackberry	<i>Syzygium cumini</i>	June-August
Golapjap	Roseberry	<i>Syzygium jambos</i>	Do
Dalim	Pomegranate	<i>Punica granatum</i>	Throughout the year
Litchu	Litchi	<i>Litchi chinensis</i>	June-August
Kamranga	Carambola	<i>Averrhoa carambola</i>	
Jalpai	Olive	<i>Elaeocarpus floribundus</i>	Throughout the year
Khushiar	Sugar cane	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i>	Sept-Oct
Tal	Palm	<i>Borassius flabellifer</i>	August-September
Kola	Banana	<i>Musa balbisiana</i>	Throughout the year
Anarash	Pineapple	<i>Ananus comosus</i>	June-August
Komola	Kingora	<i>Citrus reticulata</i>	December-February
Leboir	-----	<i>Phyllanthus acidus</i>	May—August
Some of the Locally cultivated Fish:			
Rohu	Rohu	<i>Labeo rohita</i>	Throughout the year
Catla	Catla	<i>Catla catla</i>	Throughout the year
Mrigel	Mrigala	<i>Cirrhinus mrigala</i>	Throughout the year
Calbouse	Calbasu	<i>Labeo calbasu</i>	Throughout the year
Ghania	Ghania	<i>Labeo genius</i>	Throughout the year
Exotic carps			
Common carps	Common carps	<i>Cyprinus carpio</i>	Throughout the year
Silver carps	Silver carps	<i>Hypophthalmichthys molitix</i>	Through out the year
Grass craps	Grass craps	<i>Clenopharyngodon idila</i>	Throughout the year
Puti	Puti	<i>Puntius sp</i>	Throughout the year
Putra	Putra	<i>Puntius sp</i>	Throughout the year
Singhi	Singhi	<i>Heteropnerustes fossil</i>	Throughout the year
Magur	Magur	<i>Clarias batracus</i>	Throughout the year
Boal	Boal	<i>Wallago attu</i>	Throughout the year
Tengra	Tengra	<i>Mystus cavaries</i>	Throughout the year

Tengra	Tengra	<i>Mystus vittatus</i>	Throughout the year
Rita	Rita	<i>Rita rita</i>	Throughout the year
Vacha	Vacha	<i>Eutropichthys vacha</i>	Throughout the year
Bashpata	Bashpata	<i>Ailia coila</i>	Throughout the year
Aair	Aair	<i>Myrtus seexghala</i>	Throughout the year
Singhi	Singhi	<i>Hetroprercites fossils</i>	Throughout the year
Magur	Magur	<i>Clarias balracus</i>	Throughout the year
Peach\Koi	Peach\Koi	<i>Clarias balracus</i>	Throughout the year
Coilsa	Coilsa	<i>Anabos tertudineous</i>	Throughout the year
Cheng	Cheng	<i>Colia farinata</i>	Throughout the year
Sool	Sool	<i>Channa punctalus</i>	Throughout the year
Chital	Chital	<i>China marulius</i>	Throughout the year
Hilsa	Hilsa	<i>Hilsa ilisha</i>	Throughout the year
Tilapia	Tilapia	<i>Tilapia mossambica</i>	Throughout the year

In Barak Valley, animal products are potential sources of food supply. Of all, fish occupies the dominant position. Next to fish, meat, chicken and milk are other popular sources of food supply available in Barak Valley. Milk products like clarified butter (*ghee*) curd (*dahi*) and butter milk are also consumed by the people. But the quantity and frequency of consumption of these items are subject to people's economic condition. In Barak Valley traditionally, since joint family structure and domestication of animals were common practice in every house hold; production of milk and milk products were also common. But of late, fragmented joint family structure and modernization of life style have changed the domestication of animal and habit of consumption of cow milk and related products of cow milk.

Preservation and storage of food:

Paddy is dried and preserved by farmer in a room called *ugar*. The room where all the food materials like pulses, salt, oil, kerosene and other glossary items of daily necessities are kept is known as *bharar*. As tamarind is required for different household activities like cleaning of the utensils made of brass so it is preserved in all most every households. Tamarind is dried in air after separated from skin and then kept in a jar. Pickles and sauces are other forms of food preserved at home. Dry fish is prepared through the process of preservation and fermentation

Equipments:

A list of utensils and other important household articles that are used in domestic activities like cooking, serving, eating and drinking are given in the table below. Traditionally, these utensils are made of brass and earthen matter by the villagers.

TABLE 1.10 : LIST OF EQUIPMENTS USED FOR DOMESTIC PURPOSE IN AVAILABLE IN BARAK VALLEY.

Local name	Description
<i>Chakkai-Belan</i>	Round wooden sieves for bread processing.
<i>Hari</i>	Made of aluminum for preparation of rice.
<i>Korhai</i>	<i>Korhai</i> is traditionally made of iron but now-a- days people use <i>korhai</i> made of aluminum.
<i>Hata</i>	For serving.
<i>Khunti</i>	For cooking curry.
<i>Tasla</i>	Brass mixing bowl.
<i>Kalas</i>	Earthen pot to fetch and keep water.
<i>Tawa</i>	Toasting bread.
<i>Boti</i>	For vegetable and fish processing.
<i>Butloi</i>	Brass making bowl.
<i>Ghutni</i>	For smashing <i>dal</i> .
<i>Thali</i>	For serving food.

<i>Seni</i>	For frying the food.
<i>Lota\Mug</i>	A small mug use in keeping water in the kitchen to serve the purpose of cooking and other domestic work.
<i>Gilass</i>	Used of drinking water.
<i>Piala</i>	Used for drinking tea.
<i>Pandan</i>	A small tray of different design use for offering pan with other substances.
<i>Kholoi</i>	<i>Kholoi</i> is made of bamboo for washing fish.
<i>Dhusoin</i>	<i>Dhusoin</i> is also made up of bamboo. Generally, used for husking rice.

Methods of preparation and cooking are important aspects for maintaining nutrition and food value. Rice is prepared three times. Rice is boiled in water and that water become starchy which is drained from the rice once it is boiled. When rice and pulses are cooked together, the food is known as *khichri*. A favourite and common sweet dish is called *payesh*. *Payesh* is made of rice with milk and sugar. *Payesh* is cooked on special occasions. Besides, *payesh* other sweet dishes are also prepared with grinding rice called *pitha*.

Concept of food and food taboo:

In Barak Valley dietary pattern is almost similar irrespective of any caste or communities like Hindus and Muslims, except that Muslims are habituated to take meat and beef more regularly than Hindus. Amongst the Hindus, there are some religious sanctions and restriction imposed on the food while Muslims are religiously liberal to take any kind of food except wine.

It becomes clear from the study, people in general have no idea regarding the relationship between health and food but the prescription and proscription regarding food that are taken for granted as religious value is in some way related to their health. For instance some food items are classified as hot and cold. Items

like egg, meat, chicken, *dal* of pigeon pea, buffalo milk, *dalda* etc., are considered as hot because they may create digestion problem. In people's perception cold foods are *dahi*, *chatni*, wax gourd, cucumber, bitter gourd and so on are considered as good for health and suggested to take compulsorily during the month of March-April.

Eating habits:

Rice is consumed three times a day as staple diet. In order to avoid disease utensils are to be washed properly before giving food. Washing hand is customary before taking food. The particular place where food is served is to be cleaned properly. Consciously or unconsciously people have developed food habits that are favourable to nature and nature related disease. As bitter is an essential requirement for health, foods like bitter gourd (*karala*) and *neem* leaves are taken specially in the month of March-April to remain safe from the disease like cholera, diarrhoea, measles and pox etc. On the day of *Chaitra-sankranti* *neem* leaves and lentils (*mosurdal*) are taken viewing that these may possibly act as preventive for pox. To keep physical system safe from the heat of March and april custom is to take bitter and sour. It is compulsory to take seasonal fruits available around the year. Turmeric is taken with molasses in the month of October-November (*Karttik*), for blood formation and to keep the liver functional. Anemic patients are given green plantain (*kasha kola*) for blood formation. Non-vegetarian foods are prohibited for widows to keep their mind and body under control from any kind of sexual and emotional inclination.

Special foods on Festivals and other occasions:

Besides, social events like marriage, nomenclature ceremony, funeral ceremony, *puja* and many other occasions, special foods are taken on some special

days of the year. On the day of Bengali New Year, fish, meat and other special dishes are prepared. Last day of every month is considered as *Sankranti*. On the day of *sankranti* non-vegetarian foods are prohibited including lentils (*musur dal*). September-October month is known as *aswinmas* in Bengali calendar. The last of day of *aswin* is observed as *aswin sankranti*. And on that day people are supposed to consume eight types of vegetables. On the eve of *diwali* the popular usage is to take 14 types of celery (*chauddo shak*). On the day of *Makar sankranti*, varieties sweet dishes (*pitha*) are prepared in every houses. *Makar sankranti* is not only a festival of *pitha* but is also a festival of fishes. People of Barak valley are fond of purchasing large sized fish to which are ascribed to higher status. At the end of the Bengali calendar the *Chaitra sankranti* is celebrated in the month of April. On that day *neem* leaves and lentil seeds with green mango and green jackfruit are consumed as popular food items.

On the special event of marriage, nomenclature ceremony and other occasions, it is compulsory to cook and serve food by a professional cook who must belong to Brahmin caste. Non-vegetarian foods are customary to take on the days of social events. One of the features of social event is that such events intensify the problem of social inequality and concept of pollution and purity. At the very beginning of any social occasion the practice is to offer food to five Brahmins called *brahmabhujji*. Because Brahmins are supposed to take food in a separate batch where non- Brahmins are not allowed to sit. Even non Brahmins are proscribed to touch the Brahmins as the touching of other caste people might pollute the Brahmin's caste.

Food and drinking taboo:

Brahmins are not supposed to take *pucca* food as well as water from people belonging to lower caste. But these traditional systems are on the process of change since other than social events caste system is not rigorously followed owing to the impact of education and modernisation. Thus, it seems that social organisation in Barak Valley are experiencing both continuity and change

Fasting:

It is one of the characteristic features of the culture of Barak Valley. Hereward Carrington defines the term fast as “complete abstinence from all food or nourishment –liquid or solid for a greater or lesser period of time” (1908:16) . The process of abstaining from food, for whatever reasons, constituting a fast and the duration of such abstinence constitute its ‘length’. Hindu people keep fast on many occasions while Muslims keep it only once in year called *roja or ramjan*. Some important days of the fasting in India are described by Dubois (1924) which are also observed in Barak valley.

- (i) Fasting is observed on new and full moon days and on the day of ekadashi. Eleventh day of every lunar month are called *ekadashi vrata*.
- (ii) *Shivaratri or Shivachaturdashi* fasting is observed on the fourteenth day of the full moon in the month of either February or March. Shivratri is most popular form of fasting and seldom not performed by the young women.
- (iii) Fasting on the day of *Laxmi puja* is compulsory for every women members of the family. On the day of Laxmi puja women are supposed to remain in complete abstinence of taking anything. Since the puja is

performed after the dusk, at night they are allowed to take the food offered to God only.

- (iv) Other popular days for fasting are the day of *diwali* and *sree panchami*. On the day of *diwali* deity *Kali* is being worshipped. On the day of *sree panchami* *Saraswati puja* is performed. Fasting for deity *Kali* is twenty four hours. But the fasting for *Saraswati* is observed by students in every house hold of the valley.
- (v) On the occasion of *Durgapuja* at least one day fasting is observed to offer prayer.
- (vi) *Janmasthanami* is another popular festival of fasting.

Fasting on the day of *Shivratri*, *Kalipuja* and *Janmasthanami* are very hard in the sense that abstinence period is for twenty four hours. On the day of *Ekadshi* rice is not allowed but instead of rice flour can be taken. On the day of *Saraswati puja* and *Durgapuja* fasting is only for a few hours till the offering of prayers food can be taken of. Besides, these women perform *brata* on Monday for lord *Shiv*, Thursday for deity *Laxmi*, and Friday for deity *santoshima*. *Bratas* and fasting are ascribed to women only. They are not only ascribed to perform weekly *bratas* exclusively rather all other *bratas* are performed mostly by them only.

Health care is not related with food habits only but it is related with exercise and physical activities. Traditionally, there is no concept of gymnastics and exercise for women and hence fetching of water and cleaning of floor are two disguised exercises to maintain the good health of women. The prevention and curative aspects of health are acquired and transmitted within the family. Every individual is advised to wash utensils properly before taking food. The items which are not tasty but good and functional for health like plantain, papaya: bitter items

like *neem* leaves and bitter gourd etc., are taken as healthy food items. Mother or sister and other close women kin transmit the knowledge to the girls who attained puberty and instruct them how to maintain purity and hygiene during the days of menstruation from the very first day of the puberty. They are trained to maintain purity of the kitchen more than any other part of the house by their in-laws. The good and healthy foods are always served first to the males.

Individuals are more or less resilient to illness and thus more or less healthy. The health quality may vary with factors outside the individual's control, such as greater vulnerability among the very young and very old. But one's skill and ability in maintaining health is mirrored to a considerable extent by one's own or one's own children's health. Health is seen as a fragile state. For them health is a quality to strive for the application of ritual knowledge and prudent living. The absence of health is likely to be attributed to one's own recklessness.

According to the people of Barak valley, a person who lies on the cot and is unable to do his work as well as live up to the expectations is regarded as ill. Loss of appetite as well as feeling unusual with the expected norms is considered an illness. For example, a child displaying the characteristics of an old person or a woman who loses her hair (baldness) in the prime of youth is supposed to be inflicted. Illness is called *asustha*. Illness is regarded as factor of bed time. Bed time is also considered as effect of any one or cluster of stars' out of nine effective stars in human life. In order to get relieve from illness shelter is taken in God because in people's conception disease is not cured without the will of god. Their conception of pain is a cluster of organs that is any pain in the head is considered as *matha betha*, any kind of pain in the chest region is called *buk betha* and any sort of pain in the abdominal part is considered as *pet betha*.

Deep rooted concept of evil spirit is associated with many diseases. Fever is considered as the result of evil spirit (*upri*) stipulated to get prolonged. A prolonged fever is also called *haruya jar*. Relationship between mystical belief and disease is found to be direct as for malaria, root (*jori*) of a tree is used as talisman (*maduli*) with the conviction that malaria cannot be recovered without root of the tree. Similarly, disease like diarrhoea is considered as the evil sight of evil spirit. Both small pox and chicken pox are considered as the will of God and is called *Mayer daya haise*. On the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) the deity "*shitala*" has been worshipping since the days of antiquity in order to prevent pox. Some more magical practices are conducted for the disease like infection in teeth (*pooka*) and for infection in eye (if any dust infection). For an individual's infection in teeth and eye, a kind of magical practice (*mantra*) is performed to cure. Priority is given on to apply home remedies in different diseases like use of paste of turmeric and lime in to the bone fracture cases, use of *jaijol* is used to combat with vomiting; further, tur-pine-tine (*Turfin* a kind of oil made of pine tree), pumpkin etc. and different kinds of medicine are used to blocking of urination. Kerosene oil, sugar and marigold leafs are used to stop the bleeding. Clove is used for pain and infection in teeth. Psychiatry problem is considered as the result of evil spirit (*upri*). Treatment of healer in the form of chanting water (*jolpora*), rent-received (*kabaj\maduli*) etc. all are used as medicine of psychiatry problem. Concept of evil spirit is rooted with the problem of infertility. In order to tackle the problem of infertility, people often resort to healer or the man who is believed have the divine power and assumed as capable of solving the problem of infertility. It is believed that infertility is malevolence function of any of enemy or wicked individual who might have done black magical practice (*tutka \mantra*) for not having any baby. or due to shadow

of polluted air in the napkin (*kalpurusher batas*). Generally, religious person gives chanting water (*jolpora*), talisman (*kabaj*) as treatment of infertility. Worship of the deities like Mahdeva Manasa Durga and Kali and sacrifice of animal like goat and pegin, *jaijal* etc are two common practices to get rid from the problem of infertility.

To facilitate a good health and smooth delivery expectant mother has to comply with different taboos. Pregnant mother is believed to be more prone to evil spirit and in order to remain free from so she is advised to have a piece of iron with her either in the form of bangle or a piece of iron. Additionally she has to keep mustard seed with her. In order to avoid evil spirit and polluted air expectant mother is prohibited to move here and there at afternoon (*dupur bela*) from 12 o'clock to 4 o'clock and at dusk (*trisanthya*) as well as every Saturday (*shony*) and Tuesday (*mangal*) right from the day of conception. Regarding polluted air it is believed that there are some particular places of evil spirit where they remain in air and pregnant mothers are more prone to get attack by evil spirits. In order to avoid any injury on the organ of baby; mother is prohibited to see slaughtering of domestic animals. She has to think about the divine and divinity during eclipse. She is not allowed to do hard work like fetching water, cleaning floor of the room. collect fuel etc. But at the same time it is not advisable that a pregnant woman should sit ideally instead should engage her-self in some light works. She is given all the green vegetables, milk, fish and rice. Milk is considered as source of blood formation. Cherishing a safe motherhood as well as long life and health of both mother and child. deity Rupasi (*Rupasi puja*) a totemic tree is being worshiped. The day of "*rupasi puja*" is known as the *swad-bhakshan*. *Rupasi puja* is otherwise popular as *madhai-broto* On day of offering *swad-bhakshan*; the

expectant mother is fed with all kinds of food including fruits, sweets as well as all *pucca* food (curry) of fish and others as per her desire. Rituals of *swad bhakshan* is performed at fifth month, seventh month at the ninth month often conception. In the five month it is called *panchamrita*, seventh month it is called *saptamrita* and in nine month it is called *navamrita*. Among the Muslims *swad-bhakshan* is known as *neowai*. Main objectives of offering *swad-bhakshan* are: (i) to fed the expectant mother up to her desire and not to remain any desire unfulfilled regarding any kind of food. (2) let the child who is nurturing in the womb of mother to be fed with everything.

Dhatri (Dhai) plays a pro-active role in delivery. Delivery takes place in a separate room within the main structure of the house which is known as "*Atur-Ghar*". Placenta (*full*) is tied with the leg of the patient and cut with a piece of bamboo (*konchi*). It is believed that placenta may reach to the heart (*koilja*) if it is not tied. To facilitate a smooth emergence of placenta a glass of water is given to the women and pour cow dung (*gobor*). The concept lying behind drinking of water is to facilitate smooth emergence of placenta and is then turn downwards with the pressure of water (is called *batti-futi-gese*). *Dhai* massages oil on the lower part of the abdomen when the position of baby is inverted and to change the inverted position it into the right direction. Women are considered afflicted and kept in a separate room up to 30 days of the days of child birth and are not allowed to see the sun. They are to take bath before the dawn. People whoever wants to enter in that room should touch fire or have to be beaten by a broom (*jharur bari*). The very ideas rooted in these practices are to keep the baby safe from ghost or evil spirit (*upri*) as it is believed that the individual who comes from outside may likely to carry on evil spirit (*uprir- _batas*).

It appears that in Barak valley people are very sensitive to the presence of ghost and evil-spirit, but lack of health sensitivity is reflected when they keep the waste products of delivery and post-delivery period up to 30 days in the *atur ghar*. Food like ghee, *chapati* and black *jira (kalo-jira)* are given as food for recovery of blood, quick recovery of uterus, vagina (*nari-shukani*) and face of vagina (*joni-dwar*). To recover the prolapsed uterus a kind of heat is given with firing on bricks and husk of paddy (*tush*). After the six days of the child birth Sasthi mata is worshipped in order to bless a long life and sound health. Again on day of completion of 30 days the deity Rupasi is worshipped (*Rupasi-brata*). On the day of *Rupasi brata* all the afflictions of mother are washed off and mother get her nails cut by barber (*napit*) before taking the bath. Barber's touch is considered as most important to make the mother free from affliction until. On that day, she takes bath immediately after the barber's ritual ceremony is over and is allowed to enter in to the main rooms. And in this way mother becomes free from all types of pollution related to the process of child birth. On the day of *brata* child is taken to the *rupasi tree* to seek her blessings. Child is given breast feeding and other liquid food. After one year child is given rice. For fever, cold and disorder in stomach that is for the disease like diarrhoea, dysentery or any other diseases allopathic or homoeopathic medicines are given. Healers play a key role in ailment of child. They provide chanting water (*jolpora*) and chanting milk (*dudh pora*) with a belief that the child's ailment is due to the consequences of wicked eye or evil spirit. In order to avoid and prevent the evil eyes of invisible spirit the child is fed separately concealing from other people and three drops of milk or food is disposed off towards the evil spirit before the commencement of feeding. *Talisman (maduli)* is also given by the *kaviraj* to get relieved from the disease permanently. *Jolpora*

with *neem* leaf and *machuli* are given for skin disease of the children within six years which is believed to have been caused due to evil eyes of evil spirit (*Agniban batas*).

Etiology:

Etiology is the attribution of causes for a particular affliction. For the people of Barak valley etiology abounds with the super natural and natural causes. Their range of aspects causing afflictions stretches from the concept of evil wind to black magic (*tutka* or *ban*). Diseases like fever, headache, stomachache, T.B., leprosy assumed as natural cause. But in many cases especially for children the prolonged diseases are considered as the consequences of evil winds or evil eyes. It is believed that when Shitala Mata get displeased she will inflict diseases like pox, endemic cholera etc. Mental illness in most of the cases is seen as the cause of black magical practice (*tutka* and *ban*) done by others. Similarly, abortions are seen to be cause of evil spirit or evil eye. Besides these, all other diseases are seen by the people of Barak valley as consequences of natural causes, There are many diseases like *asthma* and epilepsy that are not cured for ever. For such diseases religious attitudes like use of talisman, offering puja are common practices.

Although there is no specific deity for occurrence of a disease related to different parts of the body as it is believed that a supernatural power is lying in the rear of natural cause of the disease. Diseases are attributed as misfortunes and displeasure of supernatural beings. Mystification of natural phenomena by super natural phenomena is a rare practice. It is also believed that supernatural beings cause disease as a punishment for any immoral behavior or violation of social norms. Any complicacy during pregnancy is believed to be the cause of not conforming to taboos during pregnancy period. Main objective of expiation of sin

is either to get recovered from the disease or to get relief from present life. To get relief from ailment God is worshipped and even promises are made to sacrifice animal (*Bali*) and offer *puja* for recovery or quick recovery or safe and successful surgery or child birth of the patient. People who are not satisfied with offering *puja* or making promise they also take *Chanted water (Jol-pora)*, and talisman (*Kabaz*). And these practices are even performed in the acute stage of the disease also. Thus, the etiology is extended from the natural to supernatural causes and it can be concluded that the role of supernatural power in manifestation of a disease cannot be ignored. Functions of religion in crisis situations have also been considered significant.

Classifications of diseases are wide and varied in number but limited, and basically every illness starts from jar (fever). Few diseases that the people could readily identify along with their local names are given in the table below:

List of Diseases identified in Barak Valley

Malaria	<i>Malaria</i>
Fever	<i>Jar/tap</i>
Headache	<i>math betha/bash</i>
Cough	<i>Sardi-Kasi</i>
T.B	<i>Jokksha</i>
Body pain	<i>Sharirbetha/bish Kustha</i>
Leprosy	<i>Krimi</i>
Chest pain	<i>Buk bethaAsu</i>
Paralysis	<i>AbashTar-tara</i>
Mental illness	<i>Paglami</i>
Stomachache	<i>Peter-betha</i>
Jaundice	<i>Oilma</i>
Gallbladder stone	<i>Pathar</i>
Epilepsy	<i>Mrigi</i>
Pox	<i>Basanta</i>
Measles	<i>Ham</i>

From the above list it is clear that other than the fever related afflictions, there are few diseases like paralysis, tuberculosis, leprosy etc. There are also recognized as common afflictions in Barak Valley.

Gallbladder stone (*Pitta tholi Pathar*) is interpreted as stone in the bailey (*Pete pathar*). It has no remedy in indigenous health care. The reason may be that it is diagnosed as well as become endemic of late. And hepatitis, commonly known as jaundice is colloquially termed as *hoilma*. *Sada jaundice* and *koilma* are two terms to identify two different types of jaundices. *Sada jaundice* or *koilma* is the acute form of jaundice. People have no knowledge about the cause of either of the case; it is called *olmir batas aise*. In both cases eyes and skin turn yellowish. Neither do they relate jaundice with boiled or contaminated water. Turmeric is prohibited for the patients suffering from jaundice since it is considered as harmful to jaundice. Preference is given to indigenous treatment and there is a firm belief that jaundice is not cured without indigenous treatment. *Jharani*, *bharan* and *tabij* are three types of indigenous treatments. Healing is the important curative aspect of jaundice. However, the mode of treatment to be administered can be viewed as cultural practices. The following case studies on healers of Barak Valley will bear testimony on the assertions made above.

Healer -1

Name of the healer is Bibhash Nath, aged 45 years, male, Hindu and educated up to primary level. He lives in Lakshmi Nagar village of Ramkrishnanagar locality in Karimganj district. He has two daughters. Neither his spouse nor his offspring is a healer. But his mother's sister is a healer. He has learned the craft of healing from his mother's sister, though his mother was also a healer. Both mother and son had learned the craft from his aunt, that is. mother's

sister. In response to the questions about reason behind the interest grown in him and his mother to learn the healing method, he asserts “as every woman requires some pocket money to meet their daily necessities, so is the case with my mother. Once, my aunt came to our house, and she observed that my mother was not having enough money. Therefore she suggested my mother to learn the art which would be a source of income for her. I approached my aunt and requested her to teach me the practice instead of my mother. I assured her that an amount of income from the practice would be given to my mother. She agreed to teach me. However she did teach my mother also later. And in this way both of us learned the practice.”

His first case was a neighbor. His mother went to the patient’s home and informed that her son had learned the healing craft of jaundice. This is how first patient came to him. He claims that he was successful in healing the first case. And in this way his name and fame as a healer has started spreading in the locality. He is claiming to be serving as a healer since last 16 years and since then he has treated around 500 to 600 patients. Most of the patients come within the distance of 15 kilometers from his locality. Majority of them are illiterate Muslims. Some of them come to him after being failed in allopathic treatment, while the other group prefers the treatment simultaneously along with allopathic treatment. Most of the illiterate patient comes to him for confirmation whether one has jaundice when they find the eyes and urine had turned yellowish accompanied by fatigue, vomiting and nausea. They ask “*amar mone hay jaundice haichhe.*” According to him, jaundice is cured only with the application of herbal medicine in the form of *kabaj*, *bharan*, *jharani* and *mala*. Since the plants are created by God and the treatment is considered as spiritual healing and hence there is a spiritual relation

with jaundice. To trace the environmental cause of the disease he has assumed heat of the *sunlight* as one of the effective element because too much heat is likely to cause jaundice. He rejected any sexual cause of the disease. Though his mode of treatment is a time taking process, it requires minimum 5 to 6 months but it is claimed to be very much effective and reliable.

Healer—2

Name of the healer is Bishnulal Rabi Das, man of 55 years who lives in Karimganj town, the district head quarter of Karimganj and he is a shoe repairer. He has studied up to secondary level and a Hindu by faith. His parents and grandparents were also healer. He claims to have acquired the practice in a dream by the grace of *MAHADEV* (Lord Shiva) and the *mantra* from his ancestor. He has a family of 13 members, and his spouse is a housewife. He gives oil messaging “*Telpora*” (oil with chanting mantras) to massage in and around the naval cord and chants *mantra* over the patient’s body which is known as *Jhara*. He is also of view that hot weather causes jaundice and the disease is related with environment only. There is no spiritual and sexual cause of it. He does not start the treatment on any day of the week, but on Tuesday or Saturday only. The best time of treatment is early in the morning in between 7 am to 9 am. In his treatment there is no rigidity of patient after taking bath that is in *Suddha sharir*. He has been practicing the healing for the last 30 years. He gives free treatment because he believes that the spirit of medicine will disappear if it is charged. He treats 100 patient in a month that is 1200 patients in a year. Patients from Barak valley as well as Tripura come to him, and in this way his popularity is growing day by day.

People irrespective of any caste, class, religion and educational background come to him for treatment. Some of them come due to strong belief in indigenous

treatment; some even come after being failed in the allopathic treatment. He admits that a few patients fail to get well by his treatment. But impatience and lack of belief on the part of patient are the reasons for failure of the treatment. He asserts that the success of treatment lies on the belief in God because craft of healing is divine power, and the elements of treatment that is the *kabaj* is given by lord Shiva's blessings. He claims to have treated other disease like gallbladder stone, infertility, insanity, children's skin disease, fever and dysentery. He gives juice of *patharkuchi (Bryophyllum)* with half cup of milk which has to be taken for 15 days.

Healer-3

Kajal Chakrabarty, a widow of 67 years, professes Hinduism and have primary education; she resides in a suburb of Karimganj town, the district head quarter of Karimganj district. She hails from a joint family with two married son and their off springs. Her only daughter is married. She acquired the craft of healing jaundice in dream by the divine power of God and her parents who also acquired the practice in dream knew the same craft. She gives the *bharan* as the blessings of Narayan (lord Bishnu) and for that does not charge any money. She requests patients or the guardian of the patient to offer Rs.10 or 20 only for enkindling candle in front of Narayan. Two of her daughter-in-laws are acquiring the practice and in the absence of her they treat the patient. Surprisingly, Kajal Chakrabarty has started the healing practice after 10 years of acquiring the power. She could not recall her first case but initially there were only few patients but steadily the number has increased when her name and fame spread to the community. Now a days, the number of patients have increased up to forty per month, who hail from different corners of Barak valley and Tripura State such as

Barakhala, Chandranathpur, Kaliganj, Maijgram, Baroigram, Bhatgram, Eolabari, Longai, and Patharkandi etc. These patients cut across all sections specially, lower middle classes and lower classes. According to her children, teenagers and males are prone to the disease of jaundice. She observes that the intensity of the occurrence of disease is high from March to August. She has viewed that the increased use of chemical fertilizer and pesticides in cultivation of crops is the prime cause of jaundice because the food mixed with pesticides and chemical fertilizer damage the liver. Hindus are more prone to disease than Muslims because Hindu people consume liquor. She rejected any specific spiritual cause of the disease but believes that occurrence and cure of every disease is co-related with the divine and spiritual power. She rejected any sexual cause but as regards to environment is concerned she has opined that in summer the disease is likely to burst out more. In her opinion use of iron container and container made of brass metal are the preventive measure of the disease. She knows that liver is related with jaundice and hence suggests liver tonic for restoration of health.

Healer - 4

Asha Deb Nath, is an illiterate widow of 60 years old, hailing from Kanakpur Part II, a sub-urban area of Silchar town, the district head quarter of Cachar district. She is a Hindu, and has five sons and a daughter. She lives in a joint family of 16 members. The healing craft is an ongoing practice since the fourth generation of her in-laws in the house. It is inherited from her grandfather in-law to father in-law and then to her husband. She has acquired from her husband. She has started the practice three years back after the demise of her husband. She does not charge any money for her service because as she believes the art of therapy is the blessing of Lord Shiva. However, patients used to give her

a few rupees or coins only for kindling the candles for performing small worship in front of Lord Shiva. According to her, April month of the year is more prone to disease and there is no specific caste, class, age and sex of the patients regarding the vulnerability of the disease. As of today, she has cured about 200 patients. Belief in *Mahadev* is the only key to get relief from the disease. She is unable to divulge any cause and prevention of the disease.¹

Healer – 5

Sushil Dev Nath, a man of 51 years old, hails from Kanakpur Part II a suburban area of Silchar town, the district head quarter of Cachar district. He is a primary educated man and believes in Hinduism. He has one daughter and one son. His spouse knows the practice also. The healer Asha Deb Nath is a close relative of him. The craft is inherited from his father's grandfather to his grandfather to father. He acquired the practice from his father. He has transmitted this unique art of healing to his wife and son also. He has started the practice about 15 years back after the death of his father. He has claimed to cure about 15,000 patients who come from different places of Cachar district. He uses to give talisman (*kabaj / maduli*) only on Saturday and Tuesday at 12 noon. This talisman is to be kept for 21-43 days, and after the completion of stipulated days it is to be kept under *Tulasi* (A totem plant of Hindus which is planted outside the room of the house) by worshipping *Mahadev (Lord Shiva)*. There is no restriction on diet. However, sugarcane, molasses and carambola are to be consumed in plenty. He believes that jaundice is cured by the divine power of *Lord Shiva*. He does not charge any fees

¹ She did not respond properly, and even her family members were also not co-operative and very much aggressive because recently, local television channel interviewed and telecast her art of therapy as superstitious and mythological. She does not want to discuss with me clearly and does not want me to take any photograph also.

for the treatment. The patients are suggested to bring incense stick and candle only to offer *lord Shiva* and black thread (*dhaga*) with which talisman is to be tied. He has disclosed the ingredients of talisman that consists of feathers of two local birds along with the root of a tree named as *Aimul tree*. All the ingredients are mixed together and the talisman is made by chanting the name of the particular patient. According to him, there are no spiritual and sexual causes of the disease. But he assumes the hot and humid environmental condition is related with the outbreak of the disease in summer season. He believes the damage of liver is the main cause of jaundice.

Healer – 6

Gopesh Chandra Nath, an octogenarian with primary level educational background who professes Hinduism. He hails from Duhalia village situated at 30 kilometers away from the district head quarter of Karimganj district. He has only one son who is a daily wage labour. The man lives in nuclear family with his spouse who also knows the healing task. Moreover, she is an untrained *dhatri* also. The healer knows treatment of other disease like burning, gallbladder stone and used to give *talisman* for child birth. Nowadays he is restrained to give talisman for child birth. According to him, jaundice as “*Pittaros* (Gastric juice and bile) comes from pakostholi (stomach) to liver and get mixed with blood stream and there by causes jaundice. He claims that in Barak valley about 98 percent people are affected by jaundice. Use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers instead of organic manure are considered as the main reason for high intensity of jaundice.

He has been in practice for the last 25 years. He has claimed to explore the root of a particular tree for curing jaundice. He has disclosed that since he is a skilled medicine man and knows the treatment for a variety of diseases from herbal

sources and on the process he has able to discover the healing property of that particular root for curing jaundice. After the achieving success in the first case with that root he has started to apply the same to other people who come to him with jaundice. In this way he is claiming to have treated 500 patients in a year who come from every nook and corner of Barak Valley and Tripura state. He charges rupees 20 per talisman. Initially, he did not used to take money but his poor economic condition has compelled him to take the charges. He rejected any spiritual, sexual and other relation associated with jaundice. As regards to gall stone (*pitta pathar*) is concerned he claims it is curable at early stage and is cured by consuming the extract obtained by dissolving the fruit of a species of banyan tree in water (locally known as *dumur*) in every morning. The extract so obtained crushes the stone and the stone comes out with water. It takes 2-4 months to cure the disease. The cause of gallbladder stone as perceived by him is due to increasing use of chemical fertilizer and pesticides in food grains and crops.

Healer 7

Ustar Ali, 50 years, a Muslim well known for his healing business in the Ramkrishna Nagar locality. Ramkrishna Nagar is sub-urban area of Karimganj District situates at 49 kilometer a way from Karimganj town the district head quarter of Karimganj District. He lives in outskirts of Ramkrishna Nagar area, uses to come daily and work as a day labour in people's house. He hails from a nuclear family. He has 3 sons who also works as day labour. His spouse does not know the healing activity. But he is a famous healer and for this business he is called Mullah. The word Mullah is used to designate the persons who are assumed to be gifted with divinely power of healing.

Mullah gives root of a tree for talisman which is to be kept forever. He cannot give any certain period for curing jaundice. He conceives that jaundice may likely to repeat and that is why he suggests keeping the talisman forever. He also gives tablet made up of herbal sources. These tablets are to be taken for 30.days. Tablet is to be taken in every morning with a cup of water. Only on Saturday and Tuesday he uses to give *jori*. He proclaims to inherit the craft spiritually in dream. He was reluctant to disclose anything more than this in this aspect. He has been treating the jaundice patient since last 25 years. But, surprisingly, he does not charge a single penny for the name of god also. To him the only factor that may cause jaundice is hot. During the days of sickness patients are advised to take rest and to take oil and spice free foods. He gives medicine for other diseases also.

It becomes clear from the above case studies that according to health culture, jaundice and gallbladder stones are somehow related to malfunctioning of liver. This damage is probably caused by the food grains of whenever grown with enormous application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. These have no relations with the interference of spiritual feelings and sexual practices. The healers also attribute hot and humid weather condition in summer season as one of the important causes. However, the treatment varies from healer to healer and majority of them believe that it is the divine power that cures these ailments. From the above, it may also be presumed that food and environment are closely associated with the disease and divine grace can by no means less important for restoration of health.