

THE ORIGIN OF CLAY AND ITS USE

Earth is older than humanity. Represented as Mother Goddess in several cultures and tribes across the world, the earth has been worshipped as a potent symbol of fertility. In Hindu mythology, Sita comes from the earth and returns euphemistically to its lap at the end of her life's journey. 'Dust to dust' says the Bible. Indeed, earth has been worshipped in many religions and used for its curative powers. Only when we began distancing ourselves from nature did we also start to dissociate ourselves from the earth's therapeutic strengths.

Clay has been in medicinal use since the earliest dawn of medical history. The Egyptians utilized it to mummify dead bodies. Ancient Greeks drew on clay for the treatment of fractures. Discorides of Cilica, who lived around the dawn of the Christian era, describes five kinds of clay in medicinal use in his *Materia Medica*. Galen attributes its discovery to Hermes Trismegistes, the teacher of Aesculapius. Avisenne, the most famous Arab physician (980 to 1039 CE) describes various kinds of clay in medicinal use in his era. In the Middle Ages too there are references to its application for all sorts of complaints like epilepsy and cardiac diseases.

Native Americans used clay extensively for healing and were well aware of its curative properties. Mothers would administer small pieces of clay to their infants in order to pacify them and many consumed edible clay as a dietary supplement or for the purpose of detoxification. Studies of the Inca civilization reveal clay eating as a common practice. In fact, they valued clay more than many other treasures of the empire and, under siege, carried it with them to their secret hideouts.

Improper usage finally led to the decline of clay treatment and it slowly fell into disrepute. It continued to be used in certain parts of the world but more for specific ailments than as a holistic therapy for all diseases.

It is to Dr. Julius Strumpf of Wurzburg that we owe the reintroduction of its use as medication in 1898.¹ His attention to its value was first drawn when, in 1882, he noted that a corpse, which had been buried in clay soil for thirty-seven months and which was then exhumed for medico-legal examination, was in an extraordinary state of preservation. In 1886 he commenced using clay as a paste in the treatment of stubborn septic wounds with most gratifying results. It helped deodorize, protect from irritation and heal. In 1900 Strumpf began orally administering kaolin for the treatment of cholera, dysentery, diarrhoea and septic wounds. He was convinced about the curative properties of clay and went to Dr. Kuhne who was in charge of ailing soldiers belonging to the Serbian armies. These soldiers had been committed to a cholera camp in Bucharest. Dr. Strumpf begged Dr. Kuhne to allow him to treat the cholera patients with kaolin. Terminal patients were handed over to him. The result was astounding. The patients survived and began recovering. As Dr. Strumpf continued with his therapy, the mortality rates dropped from 44 per cent to a mere 3 per cent. It proved far more efficient than other traditional treatments like anti-serum injections, application of iodine etc. Most importantly, it was also easy to use.

After his initial success, Dr. Kuhne went ahead and used clay therapy in all general cases of intestinal disorders. For the treatment of cholera he advocated the following prescription:

Pour 100 gm of finely pulverized clay over 250 c.c of cold water. Shake it until a perfectly homogeneous, creamy liquid is obtained. Administer a tumblerful of this mixture orally to the patient every half hour for six or more doses. After six doses the patient may fall asleep and get over all the acute symptoms. The treatment has to continue with smaller dosage over the next few days, and the patient will be able to leave the hospital within 5 to 10 days. If the administration of the clay preparation orally is difficult, it may be given by an enema each time, with approximately 3 litres of the preparation containing clay.

Kuhne considered all other treatments superfluous and emphasized that for the first eighteen hours after the beginning of the treatment, nothing else should be administered.

MY EXPERIENCES WITH CLAY

Pascal Chazot

My mother, petite and originally partly Belgian, has a generous nature and a great sense of humour. But she also has a tremendous capacity to endure pain. Having borne six children, she continued to have a good deal of patience and unruffled pragmatism. My birth was dramatic and is still a great reminder to the family of her high tolerance levels. On 14th July, 1955, which is France's National Day, she was watching a programme when her labour pains started. Not wanting to miss out on the fun, she waited till the very end before going to the hospital. I was her fourth child, the quintessential prodigal!

I grew up in the north of France, in a small industrial town called Louvroil. Our house belonged to my maternal grandmother. By the time I was fifteen, I turned vegetarian. I used to also sit in *padmasana*, the lotus position that came naturally to me. Nepal became my new home when I was barely twenty. I went there to join my brother Eric and his wife Evelyne. My tryst with the Himalayan country turned into a more profound experience. I encountered a deeply spiritual yogi there, whom we called Dharma Guruju.

All this while I had been experimenting with different types of natural medicine, including Ayurvedic plants that the Himalayan region is so famous for. I had learnt Sanskrit at the Sorbonne University in Paris and studied the *Charakasamhita*, one of India's ancient texts on Ayurvedic medicine. This helped me make my own preparations. I had some knowledge about clay therapy and used it for minor cuts and bruises. Then, one day, when I burnt my hand, I applied clay and discovered its miraculous healing powers for blisters as well. Burns can be terribly agonizing but when I applied clay, the pain disappeared. This incident created, what is known in Neuro Linguistic Programming as, positive anchoring.

Once, when I had a mosquito bite on my leg, I applied clay on it. However, I left the bandage for nearly four days and let the clay dry. When

I finally took it off, it left a small mark on the skin, like a scar, and that took several months to disappear. Thus, while clay had cured the bite, it also left a blotch and I thought the process was not very successful. At that time I was not aware that one must not leave the application for too long. As a consequence, this minor incident retarded my use of clay as a complete cure.

In 1979, when I was staying near Kathmandu, I contracted an infection. It started rather inoffensively at the corner of my nostril. There was some discomfort but it did not appear to be dangerous. By evening, however, it started to rapidly travel upwards. An Ayurvedic doctor had given me some cream to apply. It may have been spoilt due to the container and only aggravated the situation. The infection spread and nearly reached my eye. It was a late winter evening and a weekend, so there was no question of seeking help. Thankfully, there was some clay in the house. Recalling its calming effect on minor injuries, I applied it during the night and nestled closer to the fire lit in the room. Every two hours I changed the application. I also tried to meditate and slept in fits and starts. Only when the clay dried would I wake up and apply a fresh coat. However, the first application itself put a brake on the galloping infection. By the third, the infection stabilized. Between the fourth and seventh, it began to reduce – rather slowly in the beginning but with great rapidity later. And after the eighth application, the infection had gone down to where it had started – at the corner of my nose.

I continued with the application the following night and was glad to note the infection had almost gone. In the morning, at around five., I was totally cured. With an incredible surge of energy I hurriedly packed a bag with some dry fruit and water, and set off on a trek towards the east. The next night I was in Tarke Gyang, having covered in one day a distance that normally takes three.

Since that decisive day, I have always sought the help of clay as the first resource whenever I have faced a health problem. In these past twenty-four years it has never let me down. More importantly, I have never needed any other medicines. It is certainly not mulish dogmatism that prevents my using anything else. It is just that I have never felt the need. Clay has sufficed as a complete, holistic cure.

METHOD OF APPLICATION AND USE

EXTERNAL USE

Quantity to be used per application

The quantity to be applied must be a handful of wet clay paste. This quantity is to be maintained for all ailments and irrespective of where it is being applied for all external applications. Put the clay in a thick, two-inch layer on a strip of cloth before tying it on the affected area.



A very thin layer can be good for the skin but cannot heal, and remains superficial. The clay must be in contact with your skin. Keep the application on for at least two to three hours till it dries and peels off easily. In case the clay turns dry and hardens, soften it with water before peeling it off gently.

Ideally, clay must be moist when it is removed so that it leaves no traces on the body. If removed too early, it remains sticky and parts of it cling to the skin. Over a period of time, your body will tell you when the cloth needs to be removed. This can happen even when you sleep. You will wake up, as the application will suddenly feel heavy, dry or itchy. Sometimes, with just a single application, you could sleep through the night without any discomfort. In any case, trust the clay and your body.

Throw away the clay that has been used and never ever reuse it. It is full of toxins. Clay can be reused only when it is scrupulously dissolved in water, dried again and re-purified. Gandhiji wrote that unclean clay should be dried, pounded and passed through a fine sieve. It can be also heated and thus sterilized. He often reused the same clay for treatment after drying it in the sun, pounding it and painstakingly sieving it.

If you have the time and sufficient infrastructure, go ahead and decontaminate clay that has been used, and reuse it.

