

HEALTH SEEKING BEHAVIOUR A CASE STUDY ON SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Most of the far flung and remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh, India depend on *shamans* or the traditional priests. They are mostly preferred on modern health services especially in early stage of disease. The modern health services are scantily established and the distance to the nearest health facilities compel the people to opt for traditional healers for their basic health ailments. The descendent of all *ABO-TANI* follow a set of belief and value pattern where the indigenous treatment system is practiced through varied forms of worship and rituals. The shaman with the help of spiritual chants possessed with sacred and hidden wisdom of knowledge of natural power are considered as capable of protecting the human being from life obstacles and physiological ailments. In some of the cases they are considered to have healed the physical wounds and drew stream of water from the bamboo walls of traditional houses. ‘*Yugung*’ the alter is generally framed with bamboo and special wild leaves and branches facing towards eastern direction and most of the rituals and sacrifices are performed at the altar.

However, in the contemporary times, the practice of traditional method health seeking behavior pattern is losing its hold. The disease and health management among the Nyishi tribe is slowly shifting towards the modern health services. Yet the traditional health healing methods are practiced and it’s an effort to preserve the extinction of the unique system.

Key words: Nyishi, Health Seeking Behaviour, Traditional healers, Nyub- Shaman, Donyi Polo.

INTRODUCTION

The Nyishi community is one of the largest ethnic groups of Arunachal Pradesh in north-eastern India. ‘*Nyi*’ refers “a human” and ‘*Shi*’ denotes “this being”, which combined together refer as ‘a human being’. The Nyishi community in Arunachal Pradesh inhabits the districts of Papum Pare, Pakke Kesang, East Kameng, Kamle, Lower Subansiri, Kurang Kamey, Kara Dadi, Upper Subansiri and spatial distribution of the community in Sonitpur of North Lakhimpur districts of Assam. The most populous among are the Akang and Leil community of Papum Pare district. The Nyishi’s tribe belong from Arunachal Pradesh and all are originally believer of Donyi-Polo (Sun and Moon) the nature worshiper and are the part of the largest group among the tribals of Arunachal Pradesh the TANI Group who consider ABO-TANI as the first human being on earth.

The Tanii Nyishi community are nature celestial worshipers i.e., *Donyi-Polo*(Sun-Moon) and practice Indigenous form of health healing process. They practice traditional rituals by sacrificing animals and offering to appease their deities. ‘*Nyeder Namlo*’ is a well organized social and spiritual institution of the Nyishis that have been putting efforts to build a model society, by promoting the value based tradition to preserve the indigenous and social institutions in the community. The word *Nyeder* means holy or symbol of purity and

Namlo means ‘place or home for realization’ which implicates that individuals are involved in search for peace, truth, and practice discipline in life so on to purify their lives and thereby are in pursuit of overall health and wellness of the community.

The priest or shaman referred as ‘*Nyub*’ with single binding belief are considered the savior from their distress and the connection between the humans and the spirits of both welfare and destruction. This must have been more prevalent due to non availability of scientific development in bio medics with health facilities in the community decades back in the century. However due to the modern health systems percolating the community the importance of *Nyub* is dwindling in the manifold of time machine. The practices the passing of the oral chants to the next generation to the ideal incumbents identified individually or by the community. The natural inborn quality that he possesses is considered as the gift of god and they are considered as the incarnation of god. No ordinary man can ever imagine becoming a shaman as without spiritual power endowed by god and the circumstances of unique qualities qualifies a normal individual to become a super being the messenger of god.

Most of the far flung and remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh depend on shamans for their need of health and healing. The descendent of all *ABO-TANI* follow set of belief and value pattern in which the indigenous treatment system is adopted and practiced through varied forms of rituals. The shaman with the help of spiritual chants possessed with sacred and hidden wisdom of knowledge of natural power are considered as capable of protecting the human being from life obstacles and physiological. In some of the cases they are considered to have healed the physical wounds and drew stream of water from the bamboo walls of traditional houses. ‘*Yugung*’ the altar is generally framed with bamboo and special wild leaves and branches facing towards eastern direction and most of the rituals and sacrifices are performed at the altar.

However, the shaman or the *Nyub* is considered as the emissary of god and is not expected to misuse their supernatural power but are accepted to apply them for curing human diseases and miseries by ritual chants and offer sacrifice of animals to appease the spirits.

The Sickness behavior or the Health Seeking Behavior refers to the list of activities undertaken by any potential individuals in response to the signs and symptom that one experiences during the time of becoming unhealthy. The Health Seeking Behavior is influenced by a varied external factor other than individual level of knowledge and awareness at different parameters. These can be at individual, at family, at community level and at the place of domicile. The other factors can be the socio-economic profile, the past and present perceptions and experiences influenced by community they live in. The consideration of entities like the availability of modern health facilities, accessibility and affordability of them besides the presence of alternative health-care provisions like the traditional healing systems in tribal dominated communities. The belief system and their dependence owing to how particular community conceptualize the etiology or history of disease is a critical dimension of health and health determinants that pave the special or particular way of treatment of diseases

The belief in the supernatural entities and their existence has paved the tribe to believe in unexplainable process and happenings in their daily lives. The connections to such supernatural entities are established by traditional rituals of special chanting of hymns enchanting and offer of sacrifices of animals are practiced to have certain control on the powers of the supernatural entities. Different rituals performed by shamans have different enchantment of hymns and varied list of sacrifices. Separate rituals are performed for dedicated objectives of particular ritual. The Nyishis have set of spirits called as ‘*Uyus*’ that are considered to be malevolent and not very akin to human beings. However, there are benevolent spirits too, which are more akin to them. It is believed that most of these spirits reside in the banks of the river, behind the mountain rocks, on the banyan tree called as “*Sangrik Sangney*”(banyan tree), in haunted dwellings, in mangroves etc.

The present research is an effort to show the essence of the traditional belief and value system of the Nyishis and how they have been either clinging to their originals or if they have adopted the transition in health seeking behavior owing to intrusion of modern health facilities in the study area. The emphasis has been placed on the requirement of the rapport between healthcare-seeking behavior and the available facilities traversed

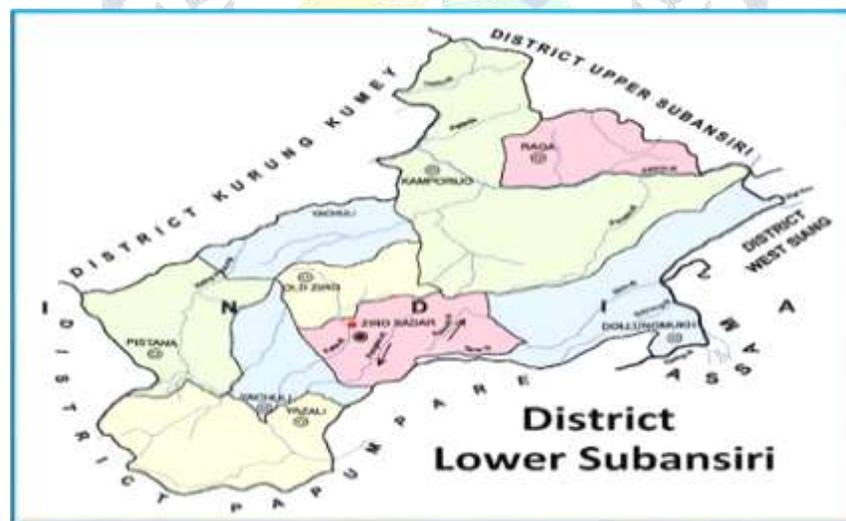
through the study area through governmental health policy. Usually when the Nyishis are moderately or severely sick, they tend to visit traditional healers lest they opt for modern health facilitators. Simple and mild sickness is traditionally treated at home. Therefore, it is felt that in order to facilitate the actual health needs of the tribal people of the study area, the health planners and policy framers must take these into consideration so as to incorporate them to find true health need solutions. A person is not taken seriously or considered sick until the age and sex in that culture concept of health is understood well by the community. For instance, stomachache or fever may not be taken seriously and if done are made fun of being physically weak. In such far-flung areas with varied resources crunch, lack of health related, low doctor-patient ratio, limited hospital beds poise hardship and deficiency in the health sector which is concocted with economic hardship of the people. Therefore, such circumstances compel the people to have inhibition to reach out to health services available where the roles of traditional healers become extremely crucial.

AREA OF STUDY

According to Census 2011, Yazali is a village panchayat located in the Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal-Pradesh in India. Yazali Tehsil of Lower Subansiri district in Arunachal Pradesh, India is situated 17 km away from sub-district headquarter Yachuli and 35 km away from district headquarter Ziro of Lower Subansiri district. The total number of households in Yazali village are 363. However, as per the latest source (2020, Census of India) of district administration the total area of Yazali is 485.34 sq.km with a population of 12676. The population density is 26 people per sq.km with Male Population of 6461 and Female Population of 621.

Yazali is a busy village town and most of the population is Nyishi tribals. Yazali, the first commercial town built by Nyishi tribals, was imagined to be submerged, due to the Ranganadi HEP 405 MW project which practically did not have much exigencies.

Map of Yazali



Source: www.mapsofindia.com

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are two major contexts that have been incorporated and upon which the present research is based on;

Firstly, the researcher has been in the field of health and health management for more than a decade and has a personal taste in health issues with personal experiences witnessing acute health problems faced by the

people of the state and further health seeking behavior and treatment in terms of traditional method of health management. Most of the people following the same are basically settled in remote and difficult to reach habitats and who are closer to spirits in their lifestyles. The research area, Yazali, the basic Primary health care system is poorly manned with little concerns shown by the state government. People are of the opinion that the traditional healer and the methods they use are the actual agents of health and healing in their communities. Therefore it is a gut feeling that the state machinery must ponder much upon the present trend and bring about more arrangements for modern biomedical advancements in the health management system in the study area. The study is also a result of the researcher's curiosity and desire to place the stand of traditional health management system in its due position in the present advancing world.

Secondly, on the issue of present social problem of novel Corona pandemic (nCOVID-19), the researcher has witnessed numerous issues that need to be addressed in the communities as found during the Field survey through the maintenance of the government SOPs and Social Distancing.

The process of exploring the traditional method of treatment of diseases and thereby health management has been under taken in the present research. It aims at analytical understanding of various forms of traditional healing system and Health Seeking Behavior among the Nyishi tribe of Yazali. This research is an attempt to overview health practices on the traditional method of diseases and health management of the research area.

There is involvement of higher out of pocket expenditure (OoP) on modern health care system as compared to local method of treatment on ailments like cancer, malaria, dysentery, Cholera, typhoid, headache etc. New diagnostic tools, treatment drugs, and assisted biomedical support are substantiated by the traditional method of treatment and healing are performed by the process of rituals and chanting of recitements with additional offerings, sacrifice of animals and usage of edible plants. It is understood that in the process of medicalisation, the pharmaceutical trials are assisted by traditional methods of health healing which have gained prominence in the past and which still lingers in the contemporary era resulting into major social changes occurring in the field of health management.

In general, the concept of traditional method of disease and health management refers to a process where the non-medical issues are taken up for treatment as disease or a medical issue, for instance, alcohol related ailments, sexual problems, homosexuality, menstruation cycle, mental illness etc. that come under the medical domain, influence and supervision.

In the traditional community health is considered as a blessing and it is the source of every happiness in a family. World Health Organisation defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The welfare state must introduce health programs to address the health problems of citizens. A good health of a member of the society can have immense role contributing to the growth of a developing society.

The western influences in the traditional culture and religious belief system have major bearing on the transition in the traditional health management system. For instance, the conversion to Christianity, especially to few denominations, have taken the tribals away from the actual practicing of way of life with not more than three decade of timeframe. After the independence the some missionaries increasingly came to Arunachal Pradesh in Nyishi belt and focusing on education, medical and some relief work for local people and converted there religions into Christians. The other social reasons being the missionaries doing social work of school establishments and facilitating modern medical care through various health camps etc. Perhaps the most lasting cultural impact have been due to the bible translations to tribal dialects and introduction of European education and learning which probably have attracted the tribal people.

Aim of the study and contribution to literature:

The need of more research on health-seeking behaviors in Arunachal Pradesh is inevitable. This research work aims at looking at the stance of the Nyishi tribe and their health-seeking behavior towards the existing modern health services in their dwelling area and their equation to the available traditional healing systems.

The present paper is focused on the following main objectives:

- i. To access the health seeking behavior in terms of parameters like the distance to the nearest health facility, available public transport and communication, treatment and diagnosis in the health facilities etc.
- ii. To see if people prefer private facilities and medical stores for treatments compared to public health service facilities as normally spoken and observed.
- iii. To understand the traditional beliefs and rituals practices among the Nyishis and to understand whether the traditional healing system is opted more on modern facilities and on what level of illness.

The above aims and the findings will truly add to the existing knowledge and literature of indigenous healing systems and the process that comprehends the modern health facilities. The health seeking behavior of the Nyishis will be understood in general so that the policy makers would invest efforts at addressing the issue in their future programmes of health delivery in the state in their administrative publications and propaganda.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A good research require available literature which may pave the way for building up a new argument or probably substantiate the existing statements that have been made. Unfortunately, there are not many academic books written that focuses specifically on exploration of traditional method of diseases and health management. However, effort has been made to go through some of the works from various journal articles that have been carried out on field survey, with folk story on local language or works around similar subject.

Verrier Elwin's 'Myths of the North East Frontier of India' is probably the first work on fictions from Arunachal Pradesh which is a set of short stories which are explained critically. Though not an academic book in its real sense, but it explores aspects of fiction by the community who owns the stories. Things would have been clearer had there been transcription of the data though on spot translations were done by the author. This book contains 380 stories collected in the remote villages in northeast India largely untouched by external influence, this mountainous and wooded area is inhabited by people who have preserved their distinctive social organization and cultural institutions for centuries although some motifs in their mythology are known elsewhere in india, many others are unique to their culture.

The 'Nyishi World' by Tob Tarin Tara is a monumental work among the valuable research works done on traditional Health Management. It includes explanation s on the culture and tradition of the Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh. The work covers social, cultural, economic and political traditions of the Nyishi communities with extensive work on the documentation and preservation of socio-religious traditional rituals, folktales, folk lore and folksongs that potray the practices along with the available health facilities.

"The Folk Culture and Oral literature from North East India' contributed by Dr. Tamo Mibang and Dr. Sarit K. Chaudhuri covers the various oral literature tradition of Arunachal Pradesh and have been taken as intitatives to understand the cultures and rituals of the tribal people. "Traditional healthcare practices among

the Tagin tribe of Arunachal Pradesh” by Pranjiv Goswami, Dudam Soki, Anju Jaishi, Hirendra Nath Sharma informs on the use of medicinal plants for treating illness among the Tagins of Arunachal Pradesh. The traditional knowledge of medicinal plants and their usage is important for the community healthcare. Items like leaves, fruits, bark and stems are used for the treatment of common ailments viz., dysentery, diarrhea, mild jaundice, fever, stomachache, accidental wound etc.

The Nyishi indigenous value and faith based social institution is the Nyedar-Namlo. The institution is understood to have found its initiation from the religious philosophical considerations and is adjudged at the top of spiritual existence (Showren, 2007). Offerings are done in the name of Ane Donyi(the creator), Sachang-Ane (Mother-Earth) and Abu-Tani (First man) as per the requirement of particular ritual. Human sufferings are also included in these processes for healing. Thus, there is a need to maintain correlation between the relevance of the indigenous faith based rituals and the modern medicine and their accessibility.

Tripathi Ashish Kr and his work of “Ethno-Medicinal Plants Used by Nyishi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, India” explains on the Nyishi tribe and their practice of indigenous plants for treatment of ailments. He has spoken of as many as 21 plant species used by them for treating various ailments. Medicinal Plants in Traditional Use at Arunachal Pradesh, India by Nungki Perme, Ratna Choudhury, Swarnali Nath Choudhury have talked of usage of 101 medicinal plant species of 50 taxonomic plant families that are being incorporated against 156 ailments by the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh. AS per the The Informant Consensus Factor (ICF) figured that plants are being used to treat malaria (0.71), jaundice (0.62), urological problems (0.56), dermatological disorders (0.45), pain (0.30), and respiratory disorder (0.33), and while the general health (0.15) and gastro-intestinal disorders category (0.28) had low ICF values. The highest number of plants (101 species) was found among the Adi tribe of Lower Dibang Valley district, the Noctes of Tirap district (25 species) and the Nyishis of Papumpare district (13 species) of Arunachal Pradesh.

Health and Hygiene of the Nahs of Arunachal Pradesh, Birinchi K. Medhi & Bhabatosh Paul. The Nahs live in Taksing Circle of Upper Subansiri district, a remotest area of Arunachal Pradesh lives on their traditional health care practices under the given ecological condition. Traditional concepts of health continue; at the same time they have grabbed new system without offering conspicuous resistance. The present paper has tried to portray how the impinging modern medicine system adjusts and reacts with the traditional one in the Nah heritage.

Not much of academic work have been done on or around Nyishi and traditional method on health management with lesser known works on the forms of traditional rituals related to treatments like *Uyi Panam*, *Oram Panam*, *Jeri Tunam* etc. performed by the Priest (*Nyub*). These methods of rituals are dwindling away due to onset of modern biomedical intrusion in the health management system. This alienation and exclusion though is factual, however the gap between the folklore and the young community today is widening in the passage of time. It is presumed that the present work will contribute though in a small way to bridge the gap.

METHODOLOGY

A pilot survey of Interview schedule was carried out before conducting the research. It was done by formulation of final set of questionnaire. The first step adopted was having interview with people who were supposed to have had good knowledge on traditional practices and indigenous faith. The students of Department of Sociology, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh were involved to do the data collection as a part of their academic requirement.

The present research was carried out exclusively on the Nyishi dominated areas of Yazali township and adjacent areas of Pitapool, Peni, Possa and Belo (Yachuli Sub-Division), of Lower Subansiri District Arunachal Pradesh, India. This study has been conducted on One Hundred and Twenty Six (126) families of the 4 study

areas where there were mixed believers of Christianity and Indigenous faith of *Donyi-Poloism*. A separate similar study was done in the Yazali Township.

The Interview schedule was used on the elders and senior citizens settled in the areas since their birth. Some of the respondents also included the public and youths of the study area. Data collection through field survey was done thoroughly by house to house interview with the respondents. It was learnt that some of the villages had more knowledge on traditional healing systems compared to others.

Secondary data have been included with available books and published articles in the journals.

FINDINGS

I. ADJECENT AREAS OF YAZALI

Table 1 showing varied believers and religious practices

Sl. No.	Name of Adjacent Study areas of Yazali	<i>Donyi-Polo</i> No. of Family	Christian No. of Family	Practicing Rituals	Church Prayers
1	Pitapool	17	15	12	10
2	Possa	06	17	03	11
3	Peni	05	29	02	18
4	Belo	07	30	04	23
Total		35	91	21	62

Source: Field survey

The Christian believers go to church and updated with routine prayer either at home or in the church under the guidance of Rev. Priests or Church pastor.

Others believe *Dony-Polo* and perform local rituals like *Uyi Panam* with the help of *Nyub* or the shaman who are believed to have power in healing common ailments by the believers. However, most of the respondents of Yazali area including youth and intellectuals opted for to take treatment in modern hospitals and felt that their health issues could be treated by the help of doctors and medicinal interventions.

A total of 91 families are Christians of which 62 of them follow prayers. 35 families believe in *Donyi-Polo* and 21 families perform rituals by following indigenous practices of *Uyi Panam*.

However, it is interesting to see that 29 Christian families do not do prayers often and 14 families though follow the indigenous belief patterns don not perform rituals. This would also mean that some of the families though Christians may be or may not be performing rituals and *vice-versa* which needs future research.

The below table indicates that the study area had four forms of Health Seeking Behavior during any form of ailments. Out of total families responded, 42% of them opt for Herbal/Edible plant to treatment their health and 49% of them opt for medical treatment during ailments. The diseases comprised of common flu, headache, dysentery, cholera, typhoid and some forms of cancer.

Table 2 showing respondents and their Health Seeking Behavior

Sl. No.	Name of Adjacent Study areas of Yazali	Opting Herbal/Edible plant during ailments	Opting Medical Treatment during ailments	Performed Ritual during ailments	Church Prayer during ailments
1	Pitapool (Yazali)	21	5	8	5
2	Poosa (Yazali)	7	12	2	3
3	Peni (Yazali)	5	21	2	4
4	Bello (Yachuli sub-division)	9	10	5	6
Total percentage (%)		42	49	17	18

Source: Field survey

17% of the families perform rituals and sacrifice animals for appeasing the spirits to become healthy. They follow *Donyi-Polo* and have faith on the guidance of *Nyeder-Namlo* (tribal worshipping place) and follow indigenous way of life style.

18 % of families who are Christian believers go to church during health problem and offer prayers under the guidance of church priests and pastors.

It is found that the traditional method of curing the diseases is still prevalent in the study area and families are serious about their health management. Some of them believe in local medicinal systems to heal the illness like fever, diarrhea, jaundice etc. Some edible plants are also used for the health problem as local treatment methods among the Nyishi tribe of the area.

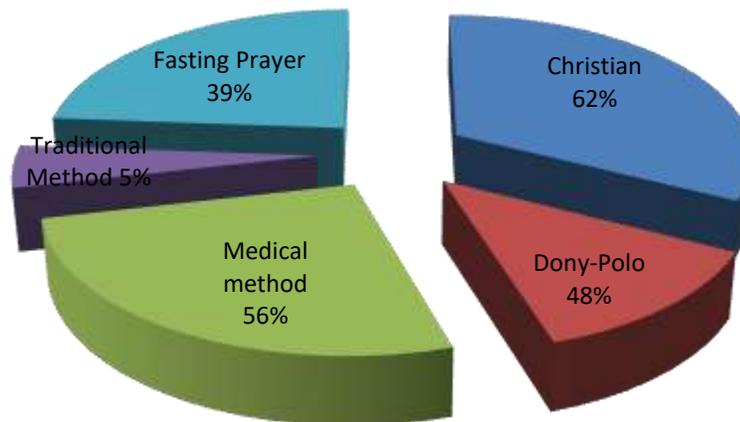
II. YAZALI TOWN

The Study area of Yazali Township is vast and therefore has been divided into four sectors into; which Market line, A-sector, B-sector and C-sector, where 100 families were interviewed. The above the graph shows the various traditional methods of diseases and health management of the people.

According to the given data the 62% of the people of the area are Christians and 48% of them are followers of *Donyi-Poloism*.

A total of 56% of the total respondents opted for modern medical treatments. Out of 62% of Christian believers, 39% of them practice fasting prayers and out of 48% of *Donyi-Polo* believers, 5% of them practice *Uyi-Panam* with the help of Shaman. This shoes that in the modern township of Yazali the Traditional Method of Healing is dwindling away very fast.

Yazali Town



Source: Field Survey Graph

CONCLUSION:

SUMMARY /SUGGESTION

In the contemporary era, the traditional method of disease and health management among the Nyishi tribe is dwindling away on the in surge of modern health management services, which seems to be the need of the time. However, it is suggestive that traditional health healing methods may be practiced and preserved side by side as and when essential in lieu of absence of modern health care services, especially in far flung remote areas.

The traditional health management system depends on numerous plants and herbal raw materials which call for proper preservations so as to continue with the traditional method of healing system as practiced by the ancestors of Nyishi, who once inhabited beside the Panyor River.

Most of the Nyub or Shamans, famous and ardent practioners of *Jir-Tunam*, *Uyi Panam* and related ritual practices to heal the disease among the Nyishi learnt from *Abotani* and *Jith Anne*. They are the original believers of Donyi-Polo. Therefore, in the ever transitional society it is important to preserve the traditional practice of healing and treatment of diseases, which in addition is believed to be not harmful to environment with no side effect on human physical body.

The state must play a pivotal role in the health management through promotion and protection of traditional medicine and link them with trending herbal and ayur-veda by institutionalizing and exploring the same in the ever changing world.

The present study has helped in understanding the following on health seeking behavior:

- i. Indigenous healing methods among the Nyishis are still considered important part of their lives.
- ii. The Indigenous healers are considered as the first referral unit and the success of healing decides their option of access to available modern health services.

- iii. Gender and age are important variables towards making decisions on health seeking behaviour; and
- iv. There are variations among the Nyishis on their level of knowledge on health seeking behaviour.

The field findings of the study pave the way to portray the actual picture of the existing health service-delivery system which is mainly formulated on the understanding and priorities of the members of the policy framers and not on the true needs of the tribal population. The prevailing health systems require to be revamped so as to incorporate the concerned approach that would include the tribal essence of socio-cultural entities.

It is pertinent that there are challenges for the framers of the policies and programme, however efforts are taken into account to make modern health facilities accessible to the people. Arunachal Pradesh and particularly the Yazali area of Lower Subansiri district is a hilly areas with supposedly inadequate health services at the doorsteps paving their right to practice traditional healing practices and beliefs. In addition limitations in the form of human resources, short fall in trained personnel, physicians, nurses and available hospital beds speaks of the visible deficiencies added with socio-economic hardship, topographical isolation and intense climatic condition.

Furthermore, the Nyishi traditional religious beliefs and practices have been impacted due to the coming of Christianity as many of the believers have discontinued the traditional rituals and worshipping. The practical reasons can be pressure on overall expenses on the financial condition of the family and gradual transition in considering animal sacrifices as taboo and violence against the living things not having the capacity to communicate. The transition has made many Nyishis in avoiding to celebrate their Nyokum festival that involves sacrifices and indigenous rituals.

In the contemporary era, the traditional method of disease and health management among the Nyishi tribe is dwindling away on the in surge of modern health management services, which seems to be the need of the time. However, it is suggestive that traditional health healing methods may be practiced and preserved side by side as and when essential on lieu of absence of modern health care services, especially in far flung remote areas.

FUTURE SCOPE

During the period of data collection it was learnt that the traditional method of healing existed but were on the verge of extinction most probably due to lack of documentation among the people and for that matter any institution in the area. The government must provide proper facility and incentive schemes related to preservation and further exploration by locally identifying the medicine from forest and promote the same by further cultivation.

Due to urbanization and modern educational system young are being taken away from the tradition and cultural patterns and therefore youths must be encouraged to learn own dialects and learn local practices. In this regard, the village council 'Nyele' should be thoroughly involved.

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