

A STUDY ON SOCIO ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF MALAYALI TRIBES IN JAWADHU HILLS

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Abstract

The people of Jawadhu Hills area are known as “Malayalis” meaning “people of the hills”. Culturally, the tribal people distrust people from the plains due to frequent confrontations with forest guards and the police over smuggling of sandalwood and red sanders. They seek health care only when very sick, leading to higher morbidity and a lower life expectancy. The overall health, literacy and development indicators across age groups are poor, as compared to those living in the plains. This is primarily due to poor health care infrastructure, limited health services, low literacy, lack of quality education, lack of local employment opportunities, dependence on subsistence farming, migratory labor, and poor relationship with the administrative structure.

Introduction

The presence of a reserve forest, there are few roads connecting the different hamlets with the main villages where the government offices and Hospital are situated. Due to poor road connectivity, people have to walk several kilometers through the jungle before they can find a motorable road, and then wait for a passing vehicle to take them to the nearest bus-stop to board a bus to the PHC. Understandably, the outcomes for women in labour and very sick individuals have been uniformly poor due to the inordinate delay in reaching a medical practitioner. There are two PHC's in this range of hills and they are often short of staff, equipment and essential drugs. The people of the hills are subsistence farmers and till recently, sold forest produce for a living. Now there is a trend of mass migration for several months in a year, when tribal people go as hired contract laborers to neighboring states. This has led to them being exposed to substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases from the plains. Children who accompany their parents don't complete their immunization, and miss a large number of school days.

Meaning

The word ‘tribe’ is generally used for a socially cohesive unit, associated with a territory, the members of which regard them as politically autonomous. Different tribes have their own cultures-dialects, life styles, social structures, rituals, values, etc. The forest occupies a central position in tribal culture and economy. The tribal way of life is very much dictated by the forest right from birth to death. It is ironic that the poorest people of India are living in the areas of richest natural resources. Historically, tribes have been pushed to corners owing to economic interests of various dominant groups. The tribes are a part of the Indian society and general problems of consciously changing or modernizing Indian society are applicable to them. Before independence, tribes enjoyed an almost untrammelled control over forestland and its produce for their survival. Forest offered fodder for their cattle, firewood to warm their hearths, and above all a vital source of day-to-day sustenance. The wonderful equation between man and nature demolished after independence with the encroachment of rapacious contractors on tribal land and the indiscriminate destruction of forest in the name of development.

Profile of Vellore District

Vellore district is one of the 32 districts in the Tamil Nadu State of India. Vellore City is the headquarters of this district. After the Independence in 1947, Vellore became a part of the erstwhile Madras state. North Arcot Ambedkar District was later renamed Vellore District in 1996. Vellore district has an area of 6077 km. Vellore district lies between 12°15' to 13°15' North latitudes and 78°20' to 79°50' East Longitudes in Tamilnadu State. Vellore is divided into 3 revenue divisions, 9 taluks, 20 blocks and 12 corporations and municipalities. This eases the pressure in administration as the classifications are based on the economy, growth index, population and other statistical data. Apart from the above mentioned, villages are internally headed by panchayat systems and Vellore comprises of 16 town panchayats, 843 revenue villages and 743 panchayat villages. The tribes in Vellore are living across the Javadhi hills, which covers an area of 50 miles in width and

20 miles in length. More than 230 tribal villages are located in the Vellore and Thiruvannamalai districts of Tamil Nadu, adjoining the Javadhi Hills.

The district is bound on the northeast by Tiruvallur District, on the southeast by Kanchipuram District, on the south by Tiruvannamalai district, on the southeast by Krishnagiri district, and on the northwest and north by Andhra Pradesh state. Major towns in the district include Ambur, Arakkonam, Arcot, Jolarpet, Gudiyattam, Melvisharam, Ranipet, Sholinghur, Tiruppattur, Vaniyambadi, Vellore and Walajapet. Kaveripakkam is a panchayat town in Vellore with the second largest lake in Tamil Nadu. The average maximum temperature experienced in the plains is 39.5 degree Celsius and the average minimum temperature experienced is 15.6 degree Celsius.

According to 2011 census, Vellore district had a population of 3,936,331 with a sex-ratio of 1,007 females for every 1,000 males much above the national average of 929. A total of 432,550 were under the age of six, constituting 224,460 males and 210,090 females. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes accounted for 21.85% and 1.85% of the population respectively.

Malayali Tribes in Vellore District

The tribal people of the Javadi hills are known as Malayali. These people live on the plateaus and sloppy regions of the Javadi hills. The Malayali population is approximately 40,000. The main occupations of these people are agriculture and collection of forest products.

Problems of Malayali Tribes

- ✓ The children have to walk for around 5 kms to reach the elementary school. Because of this, school enrollment is not much and the drop out for, the schools are very high. Very few children are going to school beyond 8th standard.
- ✓ Around 80% of the tribal people are living below the poverty line. Agriculture is their major occupation. Rain water cultivation is possible. There are no check dams and so water is a major problem during summer.
- ✓ More than 80% of the adults are the liquor addicts and exhaust all money on the consumption of liquor. This is one of the attributing factors of tribal poverty.
- ✓ Adult men and women have venereal diseases.
- ✓ Suicides rate has been increased drastically for the last one decade is mostly due to poverty induced hunger, unemployment, increased alcoholism, family disorganization and migration.
- ✓ Thick forest trees were cut down by the politicians with the help of local tribals. People do not have much awareness on tree plantation and cut the trees for firewood purposes. Alternative energy use is not known to them. Grave human rights violation exists among the tribal community.

Study Area

Jawadhu hills is situated in Thiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu in southern India. The hills has an area of 150km² and a population of 80,00 (with 98% tribals and others 2%) with 11 panchayat Unions and 229 mountainer villages. It is bounded on the East of Pollur (43 kms), on the West of Amirthi (33 kms) and on the North of Allangayam (25 kms) in Thiruvannamalai district and a part of the Eastern Ghats. The beautiful mountain lies at about 2315 to 3000 mtrs at the sea level. Jawadhu hills have many scenic spots. Temperature varies with in the altitude and ranged from 12°C to 33°C. The area is well known for excessive rainfall (> 1000 mm) and dry months are rare. The relative humidity remains high and varies from 40 to 85%.

Background

Malayalee, (Mala means Hills and yalee means rulers) rules of Hills is one of the primitive tribes in India living in Jawadhu and Kalryan Hills of Tamil Nadu. At Keel Cheppli, we can find stone houses, constructed 5000 years before. Jawadhu Hills is spreaded over Vellore District and Tiruvannamalai District. Around 80 thousand population live in Jawadhu block. Out of this 98% are from Tribal community and 2% are from other caste, predominantly Dalits and Vanniyars. The hill is around 2315 to 3000 feet higher from sea level. This Jawadhu hills is popular for Sandalwood, Teakwod and Rosewood and different herbal species. Elephants, forest buffalows, monkeys, foxes and deers are availably in plenty as forest animals. These are three bus routes, one from Vellore, one from Alangayam and another from Tiruvannamalai. From the main road, one

has to walk for 3kms to 10kms to reach the hamlets. There are 11 panchayats and 229 hamlets with in the radius of 150 square kilometers.

Location

Javadhu Hills Block is situated in Thiruvannamalai district at an elevation of 792 meters above Mean Sea-Level. The Head quarters of the block is situated at Jamunamarathur. The geographical spread of the block from Jamunamarathur is 42 Km to the south, 25 Km to the west, 43 Km to the east, and 42 Km to the north.

Javadhu Block/panchayat union is divided into eleven panchayats

In the Javadhu Block, there are thirty-eight villages with 272 habitations. The total population of the block/Panchayat union is 62,067 of which 46,984 are Scheduled Tribes (75.7%).

Social Problems

The mean age at marriage for boys is 15 age and for the girls is age 13. Premarital sex, elopement, plurality of sex, extra marital sex are commonly accepted, which leads to number of social and health problems. Around 70% Tribals are illiterates marriage are strictly from their tribal community. If any marriages taken place with other caste, they will be immediately excommunicated. People will not go to those homes even for births and deaths.

I) Educational Problems

The children have to walk for around 5 kms to reach the elementary school. Because of this, school enrollment is not much and the drop out from the schools are very high. Very few children are going to school beyond 8th standard. Female education is neglected. Even few people who are educated are unemployed in the hills and so others get no motivation for their studies.

II) Economic Problems

Around 80% of the tribal people are living below to poverty line. Agriculture is their major occupation. Rain water cultivation is possible. There is no check dams and so water is a major problem during summer. The rain water is not harvested due to the land shape. So, six months, they stay in a tribal area and for other six months they migrate to Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh states for their livelihood. Because of their migration, the families are disintegrated.

III) Problems with land alienation

Land as a prime resource has been a source of problem in tribal life because of two related reasons, first, Dependency, i.e. tribal dependency on land and second, improper planning from government agencies. Tribal people in India can be classified on the basis of their economic pursuits in the following way: Foragers, Pastoral, Handicraft makers, Agriculturists, Shifting hill cultivators, Labourers and Business pursuits. All of these occupations involve direct or indirect dependency on land. Land rights and changes in rules go unnoticed. Tribal are unaware or are made unaware about the rules which governs India's land rights. The tribal's do not have access to land records, not even the Record of Rights. This lends them to a higher probability of getting exploited, by the non-tribal's and in some cases by the local officials. Wherever lands are given yet the pattas are not given, or pattas handed over yet the land is not shown. There is a discrepancy in demarcation of Scheduled Areas. In some places it is village wise and in some places it is area wise. There should be a clear village-wise demarcation of the Scheduled Area to avoid ambiguities and exploitation of tribal lands.

IV) Health Problems

More than 70% of the Adult men and women have venereal diseases. Reproductive tract infection is one of the major health problems for women. 80% of the children are malnurtitious. Infant Mortality rate and maternal mortality rate is around 5 times higher than the national average. The traditional faith healers are playing an important roles. Their health seeking behaviours and health practices are harmful. Government has acknowledged this health problem and started some health project. But is was failed due to non-availability of qualified doctors in primary health centres. Almost 100% women are anemic. Anemia among pregnant women and home delivery are the major reasons for the increased mortality of infants and mothers.

Communicable disease like diarrhea, Jaundice, typhoid, venereal diseases, sexual diseases, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS etc., are mostly due to the unawareness on the preventive measures and poor hygiene and sanitation. This can be controlled and prevented by proper health education. Recent study conducted by Christian Medical College, Vellore indicates that around 30% the adult populations in the age group of 35+ have diabetes. This is mostly due to alcoholism and lack of physical work. Around 70% of the new born babies have the birth weight less than 2.5kg. More than 80% of the pregnant women do not have the weight increase of minimum 10 kg during their full term pregnancy. Immunization coverage is around 50% only among mothers and under 5 age children.

TRIBES IN TAMILNADU

In India there are 537 ethnic groups. In Tamilnadu there are 36 scheduled tribes such as Adiyar, Aranadan, Eravanan, Irular, Kadar, Komma, Kanikaran, Kannikar, Kaniyan, Kanyan, Kattunayakan, Kochu, Velan, KondaKapns, Kondareddis, Koraga, Kota Kudiva, Melakudi, Kurichchan, Kurimbas, Kurumanas, MahaMalassar, MalaiArajan, Malaivedan, Malakkuravan, Malayali, Malassar, MalayeKandi, Mannan, Mudugar, Mauduvan, Muthuvan, Palleyan, Palliyan, Palliyar, Paniyan and Sholaga Toda. Most exceptions are malayali and Irular tribes. Majority of the tribal population in Tamil Nadu lives hilly ranges viz., Eastern Ghats, Western Ghats and discontinuous hill tracts adjoining the plains and the hills.

Malayali Tribes

Malayalis (Mala=hill, Ali=Dwells or inhabits) were believed to have migrated from kanchipuram. There is no unique opinion about the region of the malayali tribe. Evidences regarding the movement of malayali tribal to the jawadhu hills were from Kanchipuram during the pallava period. The myths connected to the migration of malayali tribe into jawadhu hills have been described by Thurston. Actually these were the descriptions of some of the heredity leaders like 'Pattakaran' Sathigoundan and kangani. They are Tamil speaking hill tribes and all are mostly agriculturist. Their pure population can be seen in Kollihills, Yercaud, Jawaduhills, Yelagiri, and Bodemalai. According to Thurston the word Malayali means the inhabitants of hills. Malayali is one of the 36 scheduled tribes of tamilnadu and the population of malayali tribes' forms around 54% of total schedule tribe population of tamilnadu. Most of the malayali tribes have general knowledge of medicinal plants that are used for first aid remedies to various ailments.

Malayali of Javadhu hills – An Ethnographic profile

The Malayali is a Schedule Tribe community. The Malaiyali/KanchipuramGounder/ Malakkaran/ Mala Nayakkan are synonymous. The community prefers to call itself Vellala and male members suffix the term gounder. Etymologically, the word Malayali is derived from Malai=Hills and ali=people. They live in the hills of North Arcot, Thiruvannamalai, Salem, Thiruchirapalli and Dharmapuri districts of Tamil Nadu.

According to the 1981 Census, the Malayali population constitutes 2,09,033 (1,06,826 male and 1,02,214 female) and 54.14% of the total Scheduled Tribe population of Tamil Nadu.

The Malayali are supposed to have belonged originally to the Tamil Vellala caste who retreated to the hilly tracts when the Muslim rule became dominant in South India. Others claim that they are the descendants of unions of Vellala men with Vedan women.

The Javadhu Hills block is predominantly occupied by Malayali and Irula. The Malayali speak Tamil among themselves and with other communities. They use Tamil Script.

Social and economic development activities

Women's rights, poverty alleviation and other development activities

CMC believes that health and social development must go hand in hand. Development and rights based activities are implemented in collaboration with other NGO's such as Justice Ventures International, a Chennai based NGO, and Don Bosco Organization, both of whom serve geographically distinct areas within Jawadhi Hills. The Community Health Department has more expertise in the area of health care, and hence networking with these two groups allows coverage of a larger population, benefitting the people.

Health Systems Research

Several research projects have been carried out, which have helped to generate baseline health indicators and measure the prevalence of social and health problems like malnutrition, perinatal mortality, gynecological disease, soil transmitted helminth infection, alcohol abuse, anemia and school absenteeism. There are several other ongoing research projects funded by agencies like DBT and ICMR. CMC has received funding to survey the prevalence and needs of people with disabilities in Jawadhi hills, and study the prevalence of hazardous use of alcohol and possible interventions to decrease drinking among young people.

Medical Education

While the community benefits from CMC's services, the institution has benefitted from grassroots level hands-on training opportunities available for all level of trainees and faculty. Our work in Jawadhi directly improved training opportunities in the following areas:

- Post-graduate public health training for MD community health residents and MPH students: students have hands-on training in organizing health activities, documenting and monitoring programs, networking with GO, NGO and CBO, and training community workers.
- Tribal health exposure to medical and occupational therapy interns.

Indigenous knowledge of tribal women

Forest dwellers are known as 'tribe', scheduled tribe or indigenous people. More than 69% of the tribal people are found either inside the forest or at the vicinity of forest. They have their own traditional practices, customs, norms etc., to manage the forest in sustainable way. Their utilization of forest was not simply the extraction of the forest products rather it kept the ecological balance. The forest is not only the hub of their life but it is the common property.

Schemes for Tribal Welfare in India

According to Dr. B.L. Guha, "schemes for tribal welfare must fulfill two essential conditions namely, conformity to the social values and patterns of life of the people for whom they are intended and the psychological receptivity and ability of the tribal population to absorb them. Theoretical perfection of a scheme or its suitability to people in general must not be regarded as the criterion for tribal people. Ignorance of these basic facts and inability to appreciate them are responsible for the failure of many development schemes which by themselves are unexceptionable."

Welfare Schemes must relate to facts of life

Isolation and absence of intercourse with other communities are injurious to a people. Contact among groups of different races with varied ways of life is essential for human society to sustain and develop. Granting progress is necessary and unavoidable; schemes for their fulfillment must be geared to the background of the tribal life and take note of their special characteristics and aptitudes. The history of the spread of civilization in backward tracts has shown that in many parts of the world while contact has been beneficial, it has also led to very harmful results when not regulated and canalized in the right direction.

Attention to the primitive personality

A factor which has seldom received due attention is the type of personality of the primitive man. Reared in an atmosphere where the action of natural selection is much harder, he has to have full possession of his physical vigour and mental resilience if he is not to go down in the struggle for existence. In tribal communities therefore there is hardly any asylum for the decrepit; it is only the fit that can exist. The ratio of fitness in tribal society is consequently much greater than in civilized society where humane considerations often place a premium on parasitism and unfitness. Along with a vigorous personality there is an emotional balance in the primitive man; frustratin and regressive trends find no place in his ideology.

Acceptability and identification

In devising welfare schemes for the tribal people, the consideration that should guide us must be easy identification and acceptability by the tribal people and not what we conceive to be their good. No strict

uniformity can however exist in this or other respects. There are vast differences among the tribes themselves in physical environment, racial make-up, cultural patterns, the values they cherish as well as the degrees of acculturation to which they have been subjected. Nor have the manner and the extent of our relationships with them been uniform.

It would be instructive to review here the history of our contact with tribal people to provide a clear background against which measures intended for their welfare may be more rationally considered. References about contact with aboriginal tribes occur in many places in early Sanskrit and Tamil literatures, showing that in central and southern India, before the intruding foreign elements the tribes had to obtain shelter in the outlying hills and deep forests, where they lived comparatively undisturbed.

Consideration of group characteristics

Considered broadly, there are three principal groups primitive tribes in India with wide alignment even if it may mean improvement as this will be contrary to tribal usage. The possibility of improving their environmental hygiene must be restricted to the house itself, within limits, for neither the pile structure form of the house, nor the materials for building need be changed as they are suited to their environment. There is no doubt that plenty of room exists for improvement in these houses as in the dwellings of almost every people in the world. But caution and care are necessary before introducing changes which may not be justified or may not be accepted by the tribes. In the course of visits to one of these tribes it came to my notice that in some areas under the Community Project Development scheme the latrine has been shifted from its old position on the sides of the house to a separate shed connected by a passage at the northern end. In these tribal houses the pigsty is located below the latrine for scavenging purposes.

Conclusion

Present study reveals that the Malayali tribe traditional healers of Jawaduhills, Tamilnadu are rich in ethno-medicinal knowledge and plant species dealing with common health problems such as cough, cold, fever, diarrhea, dysentery, heart attack, shank bites, urinary troubles, diabetes, asthma and jaundice etc. A few interesting observations made in the present study are the use of *Gymnema sylvestre* for Heart attack, *Andrographis paniculata* and *Leucas aspera* for snake bites, *Melothriamaderaspatana* for tuberculosis, *Datura fastuosa*, *Ionidium suffrutifolium* and *Melia azadirach* for Barrenness or Infertility problems. The present study indicates many of the species are medicinal plants. Other plants are mainly used for commercial purposes. Most of the medicinal plants are growing in wild condition. The medicinal plants of Jawaduhills are to be studied systematically so that their therapeutic virtues can be fully utilized.

The socio-cultural change among the tribal communities has no doubt empowered the tribals; however, their cultural identity is under severe stress. However, it is not too late to rise above the politics of exclusion and marginalization, to unearth and mainstream fast vanishing tribal traditions, in India. Perhaps its time to amplify long marginalized voices and awaken contemporary nation states to the realization that only through the establishment of such democratic, reconciliatory, gender friendly grass root tribal traditions could one create a more equitable, more just society and world order. The reality remaining that without rapid action, these native communities may be wiped out, taking with them vast indigenous knowledge, rich culture and traditions, and any hope of preserving the natural world, and a simpler, more holistic way of life for future generations. However, it will only work if the winners support with the losers.

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