



COVID-19: Myths, Reality Effect of Pandemic on Tribal Communities

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Introduction

COVID 19 pandemic it is world's biggest health challenge ever faced by the world. It has affected on every aspect of the society and even every class of the society, especially the lower income and largely populated countries like India. In particular effects are more on marginalised and vulnerable social groups. Already these group have different challenges in their life pandemic made it worse. The aim of the paper is to evaluate the effects of pandemic on livelihood of tribal communities.

Methodology and approaches

This study involves mixed Method approach. Includes news articles During pandemic period are used as secondary sources to Prepare this Article and to understand the effects of Covid-19. For primary source visited tribal settlement and used Snowball Sampling Method at Bagalkote and Kampli to interview the community people and to understand the pandemic effects on their livelihood.

Objectives

The main objectives of this article is

1. To examine the Myths about the Covid -19, vaccine and the response of the tribal communities
2. To shed light on the effect of Covid 19 pandemic on the Society especially Tribal Communities

Myths of COVID-19 Wave

During Covid-19 there were several discourse and Myths were spread across the globe. Especially in India there are several social groups who has claimed that they don't get corona as they have very strong natural immune system which will fight against corona virus so corona will not affect them. This believe are popular among the tribal Hamlets and settlements. As a coincident, in so many tribal hamlets and colony there were no corona positive cases or deaths during first wave.

Diddahalli Tribal settlement in Chennayanakote gram panchayat is one of them

One of the resident Mutthamma states that "since the outbreak of the pandemic specially during the second wave we have not stepped out of settlement area. Most of us work as a daily wage labourer and use to travel far to estates and farms to find work. Due to second wave, we haven't travelled outside even to find livelihood. During that period, we got work within panchayat vicinity. We report to work after following all Covid norms". She further added that "when any resident in the settlement develops mild symptoms of

Covid we take precaution and proper home- made medicine by using forest resources. We follow healthy food habits to ensure good health”. So, it can be said that tribes may not have natural immune which can cure or prevent Covid 19 diseases. They are taking precautions and isolating themselves from others. This may be the reason why tribal settlement are Covid free.(1)

P K Ramu, a tribal from Hosahalli Hadi, said that there has been no Covid-19 case in 38 Hadis in Hunasur taluk, as many have fenced their areas. He said that the naturally available bamboo shoots, fish and crabs have helped them keep themselves warm that will also boost immunity.(2)

Bommaiah of BR Hills said that they consume pure honey, which has great medicinal properties. He said cell phones have enhanced their awareness of the virus. Many of them have decided not to migrate to estates in neighbouring districts and states as they want to keep themselves safe. “We are happy that many including women and children have made it a point to wear a mask or even cover their face with a piece of cloth,” he added.³

In Bagalkot settlement colony of Pardhi’s same phenomena had happened. There were not a single covid positive case reported, this is not the only single Pardhi colony which is free from covid. All over India pardhi’s were not affected by covid infection. “This is all the blessings of Maa Durga she is protecting our community so we have no fear of the virus” says Shankar pawar leader of the community. The amusing fact is that this settlement is at the centre of the city and surrounded by the Hospitals but not a single person of the community either infected or quarantined.

Pardhi women Laxmi Chavhan Member of the city municipal corporation said that we have manually fenced all around our colony and we never gone out of the colony and never allow the outsider especially one who came from out of state and we followed the covid protocols given by the Governments and even RTPCR testing campaign also done but no one found infected by the virus she concluded.

COVID CASES AMONG TRIBALS

As soon as second wave of covid started misconception covid free tribal areas has come to an end as tribal hamlets which were free during the first wave of covid get infected. As per Times Of India Report, Dated 23rd of May 2021 in Chamarajnaraga 30 soliga’s Infected by corona, in Uttara kannada 20 Siddi’s, in Kodagu District among yarava’s and Kadukuruba’s got infected, and 20 Hakkipiki’s in Chikkamanglore as well. And More than 40 cases in Dakshina kannada, Udupi, Shivamogga also recorded⁴ and not only in Karnataka, same phenomena has occurred among Tribes in different states⁵

By the above data myth in tribes like Resistance to Covid 19 has been proven false

There is no scientific evidence that the tribal have Resistance to corona but we can draw some general observation through the above cases as follows

1. There are no evidence that these peoples were not infected because as per there statement most of these peoples never got tested themselves through RTPCR test hence they only declared themselves as they are covid free so we can’t accept it
2. Except main land tribes most of the tribal still leave away from main land. There habitation is naturally isolated and free from peoples contact so naturally they maintain social distance as their homes are built away so, may be this is cause that areas were covid free
3. Finally as mentioned by the community leaders they followed Covid Rules and protocols. maybe this is the strong reason to keep these peoples covid free

But despite of all these, we can’t deny that Tribes have very strong immunity power and they have high resistance power as compare to other social groups. The diet and indigenous medicine knowledge may also help these communities to resist to covid but we don’t have any scientific evidence.

Myths about The Covid Vaccination

India is the one Of the country which has Invented Vaccine for the covid 19 and even supplied it Around the Globe as well. Vaccines are Namely Covaccine & Covishield. Recently Government announced that they have successfully Vaccinated 100 crore Dose of Vaccine but in the initial days Of Vaccination Campaign there were so Many Misconceptions and Fake news spread regarding the vaccine. Myths and Fake News about the Vaccine reached the people before the Actual Vaccine. The general myths and Misconceptions regarding Vaccine are listed By The UNICEF.

1. Natural immunity is Better than vaccine immunity
2. Vaccine is developed too quickly without proper research and it is not safe
3. Vaccines Contains toxic ingredients that can harm people
4. Covid 19 vaccine can give u covid -19
5. Vaccine can compromise your Fertility⁶

Due to this Miss conceptions Asha Workers and health department workers Faced challenges to get people Vaccinate.

Saroja an ASHA worker from Bellary, said that she was verbally abused every time she visited the Lambani hamlets in the district. "When we ask them to get vaccinated, the residents dismiss us saying they won't contract the novel coronavirus. Subsequently, many believe that the vaccine is dangerous or Vaccination will cause kidney and other problems. Such misleading beliefs are prevalent due to the wrong information they consume from messenger apps⁷.

Tribes in Mysore and Chamarajanagar districts, It was a big challenge for health officials to convince people of Soliga tribe residing in haadis (hamlets) to get the job. There are 12,560 tribal families having population around 60 thousand in 219 haadis at Hunsur, Saragur, H D Kote, Nanjanagud and Periyapatna

Shylendra , leader of Girijan community in Begur, told that there are 118 haadis in HD Kote and Saragur. A month back two infected persons recovered in home isolation. He said tribes are even shy for RT-PCR test in case they have Covid symptoms. 31,516 tribal residing in haadis in Chamarajanagar district only 450 tribes have taken vaccination so far⁸

B. Kavera, a Soliga leader from Basavanagiri haadi in H D Kote, said that the government should leave them alone. "No disease would come to haadis because we eat tuber and take herbal medicines," he declared.

Chinnamahadev, an activist works with tribal communities said that the residents reject any type of medicine, including modern medicine, because they create their own herbal medication. "The Jenu Kuruba and Kaadu Kuruba communities have survived in the interiors of the forests in Mysuru district for so long by relying on their herbal medicines. It has made them reject any other kinds of medicines. The members of the community believe that they are immune to the corona virus infection, and that their herbal medicine will help them see through the pandemic," he said

Reasons for the Resistance

Not only the Misconception is the reason to stay away from vaccination, There are several reasons tribal residents received bad care at a state-run facility also contributed significantly to their Resistance to visit the hospitals again. The people are not treated well when they visit the government hospitals even during pregnancy or when extremely sick. Such instances remain etched in their minds, firming their reluctance and distrust of the healthcare system. This is one of the reasons they hesitate to get vaccinate.

Hesitancy prevails to some extent. The notion that they are people of the forest, they are immune to disease and that they have herbal medicines has been adding to the vaccine hesitancy. But there is no scientific backing or studies to show that herbal and traditional Medicines offer any protection against the disease.

C Madhe Gowda, a leader of Soliga Tribe says that “People have to travel long distances through forests to the PHCs (Primary Health Centres) and they will not do that. In many places there are no roads nor any transportation,”

These are the Main Reason made tribes to stay away from covid vaccination

Awareness

After second wave peoples got awareness about the Vaccines. Government and NGO’s have taken initiative to spread awareness among these peoples so gradually peoples felt Safe and get themselves Vaccination.

“Dr Yamuna, who is associated with the Vivekananda Memorial Hospital run by the NGO, said that educational programmes on the pandemic were conducted for the residents. She added that governmental agencies also approach the community through them as the residents have grown comfortable with them. Chinnamahadev further said that they have been trying to create an increased number of awareness programmes for the tribal communities⁹

An initiative of the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, ‘Janadhwani’ with its live phone-in programmes was effective in spreading awareness in rural areas and the remote outback of H.D. Kote and Sargur that are not easily accessible.¹⁰

Not only the NGO’s and Governments, leaders among the community also taken imitative. Madevi Kumbegowda, As a Soliga herself, had lot of traction with her fellow Soligas. Every day, she travels to villages with a team of four or five health care workers to talk to them about the importance of getting vaccinated. Three mobile health units of the Tribal Welfare department make the journey to the remote village. She said “When we reach a village, we gather a crowd around us. Men and women are encouraged to ask questions, clear their doubts and we show them charts about the virus, how it is transmitted and so on and motivate them to get vaccintion”.

Tanya Seshadri, Director, Tribal Health Resource Centre, Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (VGKK), BR Hills, told “In order to streamline the process, 148 tribal hamlets across Chamarajanagar have been divided into 14 clusters. “We have began cluster-level leader meetings and identified men and women who will volunteer from there”. She also pointed out how conferring, discussing and coming together for conversations before taking any decision was the socio-cultural practice of the Soligas. The workforce also uses traditional ways of communication such as storytelling, song, dance and drama to convey messages about COVID 19 and the vaccines through cultural troops that have been formed.

After all these initiatives and awareness tribes response positively and gradual increase in Covid Vaccination As shown in below table.

TRIBAL AREA'S COVID VACCINATION - CHAMARAJANAGAR							
Sl No	Taluka Name	18-44 Population	18-44 Vaccinated	Above 45 Population	Above 45 Vaccinated	Total Beneficiaries (18-44 & Above 45)	Total No.Of Beneficiaries Vaccinated
1	Chamarajanagar	1941	120	1197	475	3138	595
2	Gundlupet	1670	231	1031	917	2701	1148
3	Kollegal	252	10	156	46	408	56
4	Hanur	4832	167	2981	818	7813	985
5	Yelandur	982	59	606	315	1588	374
Total		9677	587	5971	2571	15648	3158

(Source:Gaon connection, June 28,2021)

Covid 19 Pandemic and its effect on Tribal Livelihood

Livelihood: S Srikanth, director of Hunasur-based NGO Deed (Development through Education) Said “Many tribes have been thrown out of forestland and not been rehabilitated over the years. So they venture out to work in towns and risk infection. Many struggle to even find a square meal,” While the nutritional aspect is taken care of with ration supply, it’s given only for six months and tribes have to fade themselves for the rest of the six months, which makes it difficult in COVID times.

“The government even reduced the supply of rice in the past month. So many tribes, particularly the Jane Kurubas and Kadu Kurubas in Chamarajanagar, Mysuru belt struggle to make a living,” he adds¹¹. this was the story of forest dwelling communities

But there is a different story of Traditional medicine practitioners and sellers of these medicines. Hakkipikki is the Nomadic tribe which is in Chikkamanglore taluk malenahalli village. These people sell plant extracts and offer massage for physical ailments. Many of them have travelled abroad to offer their services. However, a majority of them depend on daily earnings for their livelihood but due to lockdown they can’t move out to earn their livelihood.

Hooraja, a leader of Hakki Pikki community settled at Angadihalli in Belur taluk, told that 74 families in the village did not have ration cards and the cards of about 50 families had gone invalid. “Our people keep moving and they visit their native place during festivals. It is difficult for them to get a ration card. I have been struggling for the last six months to get a card for my daughter’s family. The government cancels cards of those who have not verified fingerprints. Now, they are suffering,” he says.

one of the village head said: “the families had been facing shortage of food items and children were not getting sufficient food. If the lockdown period was extended, everybody in the village have to spend days without food. We don’t want money, silver or even gold. Give us some rice,”¹².

Tribes and nomadic Communities of north Karnataka especially In Bellary District faced different Challenges. Ballari is the land of Nomadic Artesian Communities. Hakkipikki is one of them. it is a nomadic community lives at Kampi town. Most of the community members are Daily wage labours and agricultural labours. Despite of this there are 12 Teams of Tasha Raam Dhol which is the traditional Hakkipikki band of drummers and dancers which entertains people in celebration, it is the most popular band invite by government programmes and even the worlds Popular Hampi Utsava too, and this Tasha Ram Dhol team got the First Price in Dasara Jamboo savari event where 140 teams were participated. But in this pandemic artists of this team has failed to earn their daily bread. “In regular time we get minimum 6 programmes per month and this art form is main source of our livelihood but due to corona we have not got any programme since 2 years, and even after reopening the lock down government has banned cultural programmes and restricted public gathering so even now after three years after lock down our life is running under critical

condition” Says Shikari Ramu leader of the Community and founder of the Tasha Raam Dhol Team. This is not only the Story of Hakkipikki Community there thousands of nomadic families faced the same challenges to earn their livelihood during Covid 19 Lockdown.

Health: Though there are so many special schemes to these forest dwelling communities, as supplying nutrition to these community is one of them. These scheme runs under Integrated tribal development plan in which Government NGO’s distribute nutritious food during the rainy season. This is because forest dwelling tribes tend to go without work during these days. In all, 11,000 Adivasi families benefit from the scheme in Mysuru district alone and the scheme is applicable to tribes across the State. But out of 11,000 families in Mysuru district, about 3000 families do not have proper documents including BPL card /ration card and hence they are deprived of the ration says S Shrikanth¹³. This has effected Tribal health as well.

Finding and conclusion

In spite of government awareness programme there were many misleading and falls new spread all over the communities. This is one of the attempt to know the actual fact about effects of Covid 19 on marginalized tribal groups. This paper focus on the case study and the relevant response from the tribes.

The outcome of this study shed lights on

1. Response of tribal communities to Covid-19 pandemic: In the beginning stage they were not aware of any disease later on the fearfulness to keep them safe made them to isolate themselves from the mainstream.
2. Myths about the Covid 19 disease and vaccine: vast outspread of covid leads to outbreak of many discourses about cause and cure of the disease. Even tribes have their own narrations that which includes the mind-set of the people.
3. Challenges faced by the tribal communities during Covid pandemic: The whole world stopped for about 1 year. Hunger deaths were more than covid deaths. This has no different to tribal communities too. Lack of jobs and source of livelihood push them to starve for more than months. Even today the condition is no better than pandemic.

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