



## CULTURE AND TRIBAL HEALTH: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*Tribal societies are known for their tradition. In this globalized world it is hard to think about the life which completely works on traditional values, norms, beliefs, customs, rituals, practices, religion etc. Tribal societies of India are exceptions to it in general. On the other hand we can also observe that new forces of social changes like westernization, urbanization, modernization, globalization etc. are influencing the tribal life.*

### KEYWORDS

Tribal, Health, Animism, Totemism, Magic, Globalization, Sanskritization, Tradition, Culture

### INTRODUCTION

In each human society whether it is traditional or modern, rural or urban, developed or developing, tribal or non- tribal culture plays a very important role in determining health status of that society. Tribal concept of health, disease and its treatment varies with one tribal community to another. A tribal society in India is guided by its traditional culture. Traditional culture of the tribal's govern and monitor the day today affairs of everyday life of tribal society and its people which includes family, marriage, kinship, religion, health, occupation, interaction, relationship, customs, beliefs, values, food habits, dressing patterns etc.

In this world of Globalization we are observing many changes and transformation are occurring in all forms of the societies. These changes and transformations are directly or indirectly affecting and influencing the core traditional culture of these different societies in different ways and in different densities. Modern factors of social change such as urbanization, westernization, sankritization, industrialization etc has transformed the core traditional culture of Indian society. Our traditional social institutions such as marriage, kinship, family, health, education etc; have undergone severe changes. The direction of these changes are positive and negative for all those societies who are been influenced by these factors. Frequency of acceptance and rejection of these factors by the society determines its level and direction. Like for example, Indian society is consisting of tribal and non-tribal communities or groups. Many of the research studies found that the traditional culture of non –tribal communities is very much influenced by these factors of social change than the traditional culture of the tribal communities. Indian tribes today also in this global modern world are continuing, preserving and following with their traditional culture. This can be seen and reflected in their way of food habits, dressing patterns, customs, values, beliefs, rituals, heath beliefs, social organization etc. Thus In the light of the above discussed framework the present paper aims to highlight the importance of traditional health institution and its related beliefs which is very important part of tribal traditional culture. This paper has tried to explore the nexus between culture and health of the tribal communities. The present paper has tried to provide a framework or model for understanding the “Traditional Health Institution” of the tribal’s with reference to their culture. This research paper is based on the secondary data, review of literature and observations of researchers.

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL EXPLANATION OF DISEASE**

In general, disease is a disorder in the organism. Concept of disorder is determined on the basis of the standard of the societies which varies with society to society. What consider being normal in one society may be considered as disorder or disease in another society? Each and every society has their own explanation for a particular behavior. Among the tribal society throughout the world there is a unique or different framework for defining and explaining the concept of disease and disorder. In spite of modernization, urbanization, industrialization today also major tribes in India continue to explain a particular disease or behavior in the context of their traditional culture which reflects religious explanation of that particular phenomena or disease or behavior. In order to understand the tribal explanation of disease it is very important to know about the various important religious features of the tribal’s in India because religion and its beliefs are

very integral part of tribal traditional culture. Here we will discuss about the two major religious features of tribals in India.

The first important feature of tribal religion in India is belief in super natural power. Majority of the tribes in India believes in supernatural power and use these beliefs in super natural power for explanation of various phenomena, behavior or particular disorder or disease. This belief in super natural power includes animism, naturalism totemism, magic, ancestor worship etc. We will take few of them.

1) Animism: Animism is most common among the tribals. It is sacred belief in spirits. For tribals all the spots and places are holy as they are seats of spirits. Thus for them animals, plants, trees, ponds, rivers, stones, hills etc. are the seats of abode of spirits. All major tribes like Munda, Santhal, Birhor etc. believes in animism. The importance of animism for the tribals can be understood from the following example. Vidyarthi (1963) in his study of Malers of santhal pargana found a strong belief in supernatural power i.e. "Gossaiyan", a form of animism among the Maler tribe. It has been found by vidhyarthi that one of his respondent stated his belief in Gossaiyan as the disease, famine, scarcity of water etc. all these happen only and when the evil spirits and Gossaiyan are not worshiped properly. Similarly there are so many studies which focus on belief in animism by the tribals in India.

2) Totemism: Another form of belief in supernatural power among the tribes of India is belief in totemism. Totemism is a common feature of tribal population in India where tribals believes in their mysterious relations with some plants, besides animals. Like for example Munda, Oraon, Santhals have their clans named on particular totemic objects which are sacred for them.

3) Magic: This is again a common feature of the tribes of India in one form or the other.

Majumdar goes on to exemplify adducing the Munda practice of stone-rolling or making smoke by Hos for good rain. Similarly Dube has analyzed the magical beliefs which help in controlling an epidemic, making rain, curing an ailing etc. Thus we can say that the tribal life is full of magical beliefs.

The second important feature of tribal religion in India is belief in various major four types of spirits namely: Protective spirits, which are responsible for safeguarding the welfare of the village and they are collectively worshiped by the village community. Benevolent spirits, according to tribal's are responsible for taking care of health, disease, accidents, calamities, etc. such sprits are regularly worshipped at the family and village level. Malevolent spirits, are responsible for wrong things such as death. Such evils spirits reside in lonely place in deep forest

or graveyard. Tribals have strong belief in the departed ancestors as Ancestral spirits as they share close affinity with them. These spirits are conceived by the tribals as essentially benevolent spirits. Almost all the tribes in India believe in all above four types of spirits

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL METHODS OF TREATMENT**

Tribal societies are known for their tradition. In this globalized world it is hard to think about the life which completely works on traditional values, norms, beliefs, customs, rituals, practices, religion etc. Tribal societies of India are exceptions to it in general. Today also most the tribal problems and issues related to marriage, kinship, health etc. are governed and resolved through conventional methods. Here in this section we will discuss some of the traditional ways of explaining the occurrence of diseases and also different ways of healing various diseases among the tribals of India. Like for example among the Onge, a hunting and food gathering tribe of little Andaman, the prominent methods which they use for treatment of various diseases includes use of clay, bark, turtle fat, hot smoke etc. In some cases the patient consults 'Kuvera' who does cure sufferings caused due to evil spirits. Similarly among the Nicobarese, Manluana, (witch doctor) is consulted to remove complications.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the above discussion we can conclude that socio-cultural framework of the tribal society of India in particular and other tribal societies of the world in general is so strong to guide the functioning of the tribal affairs of day today life which include health, kinship, marriage, death, birth and overall social organization of the tribals on one hand. On the other hand we can also observe that new forces of social changes like westernization, urbanization, modernization, globalization etc. are influencing the tribal life. What is interesting here to understand is that inspite of this whole process of social change Tribals of India are maintaining and preserving their social and cultural identity and their tradition for which they are known.

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