



EMPOWERING TRIBAL GIRLS: A GUIDE TO HOLISTIC HEALTH

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Abstract : *Providing health care services to Native women has become a challenge owing to the severity of illness in particular, diabetes, alcoholism, and arthritis in this group today. If comprehensive health care is to be offered, coordination of services between health and mental health practitioners is needed. Gathering together to support each other has been a traditional custom for Native women. An integrated health care model is discussed that offers Native women an opportunity to deal with the challenge of mental health and health issues through traditional activities, enhancing their physical and spiritual health and receiving education while creating an atmosphere of empowerment and mutual support.*

Key Words : *Tribal girls, Empowering, Holistic Health, Illness, Forest Dwellers.*

INTRODUCTION

Scheduled Tribes constitute 8.6% of the total population of India (Census 2011), inhabiting about 15% of the geographical area, in various ecological and Geo-climatic conditions, mainly in forest, hilly and border areas. The Constitution of India provides special protection to the Scheduled Tribes under Schedules V and VI. There are more than 705 Scheduled Tribe groups notified under Article 342 of the Constitution of India. There are 75 groups of tribals in 18 States and UTs of Andaman & Nicobar Islands identified and categorised as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in view of their declining or stagnant population, low level of literacy, pre-agricultural level of technology and economic backwardness. The development of tribal population has engaged the attention of the Government since Independence. Beginning with the development of Scheduled Tribes through Community Development Programmes, Special Multipurpose Tribal Development

Block to the introduction of Tribal Sub Plan, several initiatives have been taken for the welfare and development of tribal communities.

OBJECTIVES

- To assess the impact of holistic welfare of tribal communities.
- To empowering the indigenous tribal communities.
- To Improve infrastructure And Livelihood Opportunities of tribal girls.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the analysis of the secondary data and published in the varies journals, annual reports and websites.

Descriptive research includes surveys and fact finding enquires of different kinds. The major purpose of descriptive research is description of the situation as it exists at present. The researcher used secondary data for developing understanding of the pivotal role in the current issue of empowering tribal girls a guide to holistic health.



EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT

Ekalavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) have been set up to provide quality education to ST students (Class VI-XII) in remote areas through residential schooling facilities. Presently, more than 1.2 lakh students are enrolled in 401 EMRS. It is noteworthy to know that the number of female students (60,815) in EMRSs exceeds that of male students (59,255). Moreover, a total of 38,000 teachers and support staff are being recruited for the Ekalavya Model Residential Schools which will benefit 3.5 lakh tribal students. A number of Fellowship and Scholarship Programmes have also been launched to provide financial assistance to ST students for studies ranging from pre-matric and post-matric levels to the pursuit of higher education and studies abroad. Notably, during the last nine years, a total of 3.15 Crore tribal students have received scholarships/fellowships of over Rs. 17,087 Crore (from April 2014 till September 2023).

EMPOWERING THE TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Recognizing the need to protect the socio-cultural fabric of tribal communities and underscoring their role in nation-building, the makers of the Constitution of India made special provisions for the protection of tribal culture and the development of Scheduled Tribes. Apart from the above constitutional safeguards, a separate Ministry named the Ministry of Tribal Affairs was set up in 1999 with the objective of providing a more focused approach to the integrated socio-economic development of the Scheduled Tribes (STs). The programmes and

schemes of the Ministry are intended to support and supplement other Central Ministries, State Governments and voluntary organizations and to fill critical gaps in institutions and programmes, taking into account the situation of STs through financial assistance. In another initiative for tribal empowerment, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (In short FRA) was enacted by the Parliament to recognize and vest forest rights in the Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers who have been residing in forest land for generations, but whose rights on ancestral lands and their habitat were not adequately recognized resulting in historical injustice to them. The Act came into effect on 31.12.2007. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Rules, 2007 were notified on 01.01.2008. Under this act, total Community rights given up to May 2014 was 23,578 whereas during the period from 2014 to June 2023, 86,621 community rights have been given across the country. The total extent of land distributed during the period from the inception of FRA to May 2014 was 55.30 lakh acres whereas, during the period from 2014 to June 2023, 122.60 lakh acres have been given, which is almost double the figure during the period till May 2014. A total of 177.90 lakh acres of forest land (47.56 lakh acres individual and 130.34 lakh acres community) has been distributed up to 30.06.2023 across the country.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Prioritizing the welfare of tribal communities, the budget allocation of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has been substantially increased from



Rs.4295.94 crore in 2013-14 to Rs.12461.88 crore in 2023-24 i.e., an increase of around 190.01%. Funds are released to States under Article 275(1) of the Constitution to enable them to meet the cost of such schemes of development as may be undertaken by the State for the purpose of promoting tribal welfare. Under the Pradhan Mantri Vanbandhu Vikas Yojana, a venture capital fund has been set up to promote entrepreneurship/start-up projects by ST youth. Minimum Support Price (MSP) is ensured for Minor Forest Produce, and marketing support for tribal products is provided through the Pradhan Mantri Jan Jatiya Vikas Mission. Under this mission, the total number of Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (VDVK) sanctioned is 3958 while an amount of Rs. 398.49 crore has been disbursed. A total number of 183412 tribal persons is associated with this scheme.

TRIFED, (Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India) supports retail marketing for livelihood development among tribal communities of India. A provision of Rs. 288 crores has also been made in the annual budget estimate for the fiscal year 2023-24 to be implemented through TRIFED, specifically through the formation of Self-Help Groups and producer enterprises. Under TRIFED, a Central Sector Scheme 'Marketing and Logistics Development for Promotion of Tribal Products from North -Eastern Region (PTP-NER)', was launched for the benefit of Scheduled Tribes of the Northeastern Region, in Manipur on 18th April, 2023.

IMPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE AND LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

The Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY) aims to provide

basic infrastructure in villages with a significant tribal population. Under the scheme, 36428 villages having 50% tribal population and 500 Scheduled Tribes (STs) have been identified for providing basic infrastructure facilities in these villages, which includes villages in the Aspirational Districts identified by NITI Aayog. Out of the total Aspirational Districts, 86 Districts are common wherein 10509 villages are covered under PMAAGY.

INITIATIVES FOR BETTER HEALTH OUTCOMES

Under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the National Health Mission has prepared a comprehensive guideline to control and prevent Haemoglobinopathies, including Sickle Cell Disease, and has disseminated the same to the states. The government has worked to ensure the near-total eradication of Sickle Cell disease, which is a genetic blood disorder affecting the tribal population in Central, Western and Southern India. In this regard, the Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission was launched by the Prime Minister from Madhya Pradesh on 1st July 2023. The Mission aims to provide affordable and accessible care to all Sickle Cell Disease patients, quality of care for SCD patients and reduction in the prevalence of Sickle Cell Disease through awareness creation, universal screening of 7 crore people in the age group of 0-40 years in affected 278 districts of tribal areas, and counselling through collaborative efforts of central ministries and state government. A total number of 58.6 lakh people has been screened under this Mission.

Other health-related schemes, such as Mission Indradhanush, aimed



at ensuring full immunization with all available vaccines for children up to two years of age and pregnant women and provision of free vaccines against COVID-19, have laid stress on *Adivasi* communities. Another important scheme with special reference to tribal groups is the Nikshay Mitra initiative to ensure additional diagnostic, nutritional, and vocational support to those on tuberculosis treatment. In addition to the above, the Support to Tribal Research Institute (TRI) scheme aims to strengthen TRIs to carry out research, documentation, training and capacity-building activities and serve as a knowledge hub catering to overall tribal development.

OTHER INITIATIVES FOR HOLISTIC WELFARE OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Apart from the schemes that are administered by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the focus is given to tribal welfare by initiatives under other ministries of the Government, cutting across sectors and domains. From housing and road connectivity under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, respectively, to financial empowerment through Jan Dhan accounts, formation of Self-Help Groups and MUDRA Yojana, various Government programmes have greatly benefitted the tribal communities. Swachh Bharat, Gobardhan Scheme and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana are some other such schemes, as highlighted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address on the occasion of Janjatiya Gaurav Divas 2022. The nation is moving with the energy of 'Panch Pran' to realize the dreams of Bhagwan Birsa Munda and

crores of Janjatiya brave hearts, as was also underlined by the Prime Minister.

HONOURING AND CELEBRATING INDIA'S TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

10 Tribal Freedom Fighters' Museums have been sanctioned in States where tribals lived, struggled against the British and refused to bow down. On November 01, 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for preparing a roadmap to develop Mangarh Dham in Rajasthan's Banswara district. Mangarh Dham, situated near the Rajasthan-Gujarat border, is the site where over 1500 Bhil freedom fighters lost their lives in 1913 in a mass shooting by the British. The Mangarh Dham will be developed as a joint project of the governments of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, as a national memorial showcasing tribal legacy and their rich cultural heritage.

The focus of Government has been overall development of STs and to bring them at par with the other communities in the country. Government has taken various steps for the development of tribals under Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes (DAPST), of the schemes of the obligated Ministries/Department. There have been considerable improvements in the socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Tribes (STs), for example, the literacy rate for STs has improved from 59% (Census) in 2011 to 71.6% (as per Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), July 2020 - June 2021), bringing down the gap between overall and ST literacy from 14 percent between 2001-2011 to 7.5 percent between 2011-2021. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at upper Primary level has



improved from 91.3 (2013-14) to 98 (2021-22); GER for ST students at secondary level (IX-X) has increased from 70.2 (2013-14) to 78.1 (2021-22); GER for ST students at senior secondary level (XI-XII) has increased from 35.4 (2013-14) to 52.0 (2021-22) and GER for ST students at higher education level has increased from 13.7 (2014-15) to 18.9 (2020-21).

All these initiatives, along with other steps taken by the government, have paved the path of bringing the tribal communities into the mainstream while honouring their cultures, legacies and ways of life.

TRIBAL HEALTH

Health and wellbeing of the vulnerable population is a priority area for the government. The National Health Policy – 2017, by envisaging “health for all” as its goal, bears testament to that. The Ministry is making continuous efforts to mitigate the health gap among tribal populations through schematic interventions under various programmes. Despite suffering from poor health and nutrition status compared to the rest of the population there is lack of credible data on the health situation of different tribal communities, which was pointed out by expert committee also. In the absence of a comprehensive picture of tribal health in the country, policy measures and government programmes are often ad-hoc. There is a vast disparity between the health outcomes of India’s tribal population vis-à-vis its non-tribal population.

THE NATIVE WOMEN’S HEALTH GROUP

For Native women, gathering together and participating in activities is an empowering experience and a way to communicate and share stories and

information. Spending time together in a positive way contributes to developing supportive relationships. The women in this group were all grandparents. They all had diabetes and arthritis and were recovering from alcoholism. The purpose of the group was to offer these women an opportunity to deal with physical and emotional pain and to experience an intimate connection to each other. Since the women lived in the same community and were from the same tribe, their families had known each other for several generations. They shared stories about relatives, home remedies to relieve pain, and new ways to cook traditional foods. I met with the group weekly at the community healing center, Wajevjo (meaning “house of the people” in the Yavapai language). This facility offered health, mental health, and preventive services. Community health and mental health practitioners shared space in the center.

Group activities included the following:

- **Storytelling:** During our time together, the women gathered in a circle to share stories.
- **Meals:** The women shared healthy meals, usually preceded by a prayer, and discussed recipes for diabetics and women with cardiovascular disease. Meals were provided by the center or by the women.
- **Yoga:** Members of the group participated in a weekly yoga class. They learned postures that benefit the kidneys, cardiovascular system, and pancreas and enjoyed the benefits of relaxation and increased energy.
- **Walks:** The women took short walks together through the community and in the desert. These walks benefited their overall health and gave them an opportunity to chat about community events. On desert walks, the women



felt empowered both by the exercise and by the connection they felt to the land of their ancestors.

- **Retreats and field trips:** Several retreats were scheduled to help the women reflect on their health and their personal lives. During these retreats, the sweat lodge offered relief from joint pain related to arthritis, stretching and breathing exercises offered help with stress reduction, and short hikes gave the women alternatives to sedentary behaviors. They found that they had more energy, felt more relaxed, and had controlled blood sugar levels.
- **Education:** Guest speakers brought in information about ways to improve health. The community health and mental health program offered by the center helped the women understand and treat conditions such as depression and diabetes.

Many stories and feelings were shared during these times, often with tears and laughter. Ending the gathering with a prayer usually a prayer for good health for members and their families was part of the structure.

CONCLUSION

Government of India has an unwavering commitment towards development of Tribal communities. While anticipating the tremendous challenges in developing them, and at the same time conserving their cultural heritage, for a population so diverse and unique in their own ways with more than 705 different tribal communities spread across the country, the ministry has envisaged and implemented several initiatives. The MoTA through comprehensive data-driven digital governance model is reaching out to the

diverse tribal population while covering all critical sectors like, education, health, livelihood, water and village development to achieve holistic development through improving standard of life of these deprived communities through initiatives like EMRS, Vandhan Vikas Kendra and scholarship schemes. These initiatives are changing lives of millions of tribal people. Integration with electronic authentication, digital payments, PFMS and EAT has brought accountability and transparency to the system by tracking entire fund flow utilization for asset creation or cash transfer to tribal beneficiary and every penny spent on the welfare of the tribals is utilised effectively and the agencies implementing the schemes are made accountable. These initiatives would ensure a dignified life to the tribal communities and realise the cherished goal of our Hon'ble Prime Minister; "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas". The empowerment of Tribal Community, which is at the bottom of the ladder, would surely transform India.

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