



The Health of the Iruliga Tribe in Karnataka

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Abstract

Health is one of the main determinants of tribal societies' well-being and is a crucial element of human development and advancement. The Iruliga tribe has been excluded from every kind of privilege in civilization due to their exclusion. The Iruligas have numerous issues due to their socio-economic inferiority and backwardness, making them even more vulnerable. One of these issues is their health. The current study aims to highlight the poor health of the Iruliga tribe in Karnataka.

Keywords: Agriculture, Customs, Deprived, Health, Iruliga, Malnourishment.

Introduction

The development and welfare of India's tribal groups have received top emphasis from national and state administrations. From foragers to shift cultivators, pastoralists to marginal farmers, and finally to irrigation-based agriculture, the scheduled tribes (ST) exhibit a wide variety of human and cultural development. Scheduled Tribes make up 8.2% of the overall population of the country. The particular manner of life, customs, professions, and religious and cultural ceremonies of the Tribes are well known. Tribal people inhabit every region of India. The majority of Scheduled Tribes continue to live in poverty, have poor literacy rates, suffer from malnutrition and several diseases, and face the possibility of being evicted, according to the National Policy on Tribals.

Tribal Health Conditions

Health is essential to everyone's welfare and is necessary for human progress. Several variables, including social, economic, and political ones, influence health problems in each tribal society. Factors including a lack of clean water, filthy living conditions, difficult terrain, malnutrition, insufficient maternity and child health services, poverty, illiteracy, and superstition have all been linked to the unhealthiness of tribes. Tribes frequently experience skin diseases, nutritional shortages, anemia, upper respiratory infections, malaria, and gastrointestinal issues such as severe diarrhea, intestinal protozoa, and upper respiratory

infections. The bulk of these illnesses can be prevented by raising public knowledge of health issues, providing nutritious food, and providing quick access to medical facilities.

Aim of the Study

Recognize the Iruliga tribe's ancestry and the state of their health in the Mysore and Ramanagara districts.

Methodology

The current study was conducted in the Karnataka state districts of Mysore and Ramanagara. Purposive sampling techniques have been employed with scheduled interview schedules to get the primary data. The same is true for collecting pertinent literature from secondary sources, including journals, books, encyclopedias, gazetteers, reports, and websites.

Background of The Iruliga Tribe

Irula tribe belongs to the Dravidian family; Iruliga means "dark people/darkness" in Kannada, and the root word irul, means "darkness" in Tamil and Malayalam. Thurston speculated that it either referred to the darkness of the jungles they inhabited or their dark skin complexion. Iruligas are concentrated in the Ramanagara and Mysore districts of Karnataka. Tamil Nadu, The Irulas reside in Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Ariyalur, Cuddalore, Coimbatore, and Nilgiris. In Kerala, the Irulas are in the Palakkad district. Predominant occupation of the Iruliga tribe has been a rat, snake catching, and honey collection. They also work as laborers in the agricultural fields during the sowing and harvesting seasons.

Ramanagara district consists of four talukas; out of them, the highest and lowest number of Iruliga people live respectively in Kanakapura, followed by Magadi taluk. Similarly, in the Mysore district, Iruligas reside in Hunusuru, Piriypattana, and HD Kote Talukas.

Results Evaluation

The socio-economic development of the population depends on their being in good health. However, one of the major issues facing the Iruligas is their state of health. Some of them are afflicted with fatal illnesses. Poor health resulted from unhygienic living conditions, a lack of access to clean water, undernourishment, malnutrition, faith in bad spirits, and superstitious beliefs. When trapping rats, smoke is pushed through their lips, which causes serious respiratory and cardiovascular issues in Iruligas. Certain of them are commonly affected by skin conditions, TB, fever, typhoid, cold, etc. Leprosy, malaria, jaundice, typhoid, chest discomfort, back pain, stomach pain, and other issues were also recorded.

According to local medical professionals, the primary illnesses affecting the Iruliga people are skin diseases such as scabies, tropical ulcer, dysentery trouble, and STDs of all kinds. Epidemics such as chickenpox, whooping cough, and mumps are annual phenomena. This shows the poor health, hygiene, and sanitation among the Iruligas, their vulnerability to infectious disease, and the lack of health service facilities.

Source of Treatment for Illness

Sl.No	Particulars of Treatment	No. of Respondents	Percentage
01	Herbs	209	59.72
02	Health Centers	91	26
03	God/Goddess	50	14.28
Total		350	100.00

The above table indicates the kind of treatment is seeking by the Iruliga tribe to overcome illness; about 59 percent of respondents are using herbs, 26 percent of respondents are visiting health centers run by the Government, and 14.28 percent of respondents approach their kuladevathas(Ethnic God/Goddess) to find a remedy for illness. Since Iruligas live nearby, the forest finds a remedy for their illness with the help of herbs that are available in the forest

The doctors working in this tribal area opined that the main diseases prevalent among the Iruliga population are skin diseases such as scabies, tropical ulcer, dysentery trouble, and STDs. Epidemics such as chickenpox, whooping cough, and mumps are annual. This shows the poor health, hygiene, and sanitation among the Iruligas, their vulnerability to communicable diseases, and the lack of health service facilities.

- It is found that a good proportion of the Iruligas believe that evil spirits cause diseases. Because they believe in superstition, they often go to priests and magicians to eliminate health problems.
- Iruliga women suffer from various diseases because of malnutrition, undernourishment, lack of medical facilities, overburdened work, and unhygienic living conditions.
- Alcoholism is a very common practice among the Iruliga tribe. A good portion of their earnings is spent on alcoholism. As alcoholism has become part and parcel of their life, it affects their health, and they also become victims of death.
- Among Iruligas, 80 percent of the deliveries occur at home with the assistance of traditional tribal midwives or an aged woman. Poor nutrition of the mother, unhygienic surroundings, and improper child care lead to a high infant mortality rate.

Recommendations

- Iruliga tribes need special attention due to their vulnerability in the present situation. Their customary right to land, forest, and sources of livelihood must be respected and protected.
- The discriminatory credit policy of the financial institutions is a major deterrent to the participation of Iruliga people in business. ST entrepreneurs must be given credit facilities on par with other social groups. Further, all steps must be taken by the Government for skill development among the tribal youths to make them employable or self-employed, according to their aspirations.
- Iruligas should be encouraged to use their traditional knowledge to meet their needs by recreating ecosystem and forest-based livelihood.

Conclusion

To some extent, Iruligas use self-recognized herbal medicines in a wide range. Non-tribal communities are also availing these medicinal services from iruligas. Service-oriented medicinal practice is persisting for a long time. In this respect, they never urged Government to set up hospitals at their hamlets. The matter of great concern is that the policy of eviction of Iruligas from the forest is not desirable. On the other hand, unless they strengthen their socio-economic conditions, it is very hard to expect health among poor Iruligas. The paradox of society is that big corporations are investing billions of CSR funds in promoting well-to-do people further; at the same time, organizations working for the welfare of tribes have failed to convince the corporations to think over the poor indigenous people of the nation and their health.

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