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Tribals of India and Traditional Medications Used by Them

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ABSTRACT: A tribe is a group of people sharing common ancestry and culture and prefer to live by themselves in a closed society. The tribes of India are the indigenous or native people who are widespread throughout the country. Tribes comprise a significant part of the Indian population, and tribal culture is an integral part of our intangible national heritage. Hence, we must know about some of the important tribes of India.

KEYWORDS: tribes, traditional, medications, India, culture

I. INTRODUCTION

The tribal population is scattered all across the Indian mainland- in nearly all the states and union territories, in several pockets. The places with maximum tribal settlements are Mizoram (94.4% of the population), Lakshadweep (94%), Meghalaya (86.1%), and Nagaland (86.5%). Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Assam and West Bengal, too, have important tribal settlements. With a broader view, the scheduled tribes make up 8.6% of the total population in India. The most commonly known tribes of India are Gonds, Bhils (or Bheels), Santhal, Munda, Khasi, Garo, Angami, Bhutia, Chenchu, Kodaba, and the Great Andamanese Tribes.

Of all these tribes, the Bhil tribal group, as per the 2011 census, is the largest tribe in India. It constitutes a staggering 38% of the country's total scheduled tribal population. [1,2,3]

The Bhils have their own language named after them, but most members also speak Marathi and Gujarati, and the official state language where they are based. The tribe has its roots in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, parts of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and even some parts of Tripura, making it the biggest tribe in India.

Additionally, Bhil is one of the very few scheduled tribes in India that is famous for its art form called the Bhil Art. The purpose of these artworks is to portray the everyday life of the tribe members. They make various items using twigs and branches of the Neem tree as brushes and natural colour pigments derived from different leaves and flowers.

Bhil Art is also unique in its way of depicting their deities and ancestors in the form of dots painted over the background of the painting in various colours and patterns, giving it a unique look.

The Gond Tribe

The Gond tribe is second only to the Bhils in terms of population size. Called the second-largest tribe of India, the tribe of Gond is spread across states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Bihar, and Orissa. Standing at a massive population of over four million tribal members, the Gond constitutes a major percentage (35.6%) of the country's total tribal population.

The overall literacy rate is an important factor in recognising how developed a country is. The literacy rate among the tribes of India, as recorded in 1961, was as low as 8.5%. To improve the scenario, the Government of India introduced many reservation schemes. Following the implementation of these widescale measures, the literacy rate has jumped to 63.1% as of the 2011 census. The census also found that male members of the tribal people are more literate, standing at 71%, than the female members who have a literacy rate of around 54%. One of the primary reasons for this massive jump in figures is certainly the measures taken by the government in the post-independence era aimed at the upliftment of the tribal population.

However, there are still certain areas of complication and difficulty that majorly slow down the rate of progress of literacy among the tribal people. Some of these challenges are:



1. The tribal people are usually very weak in terms of their economic conditions. Thus, the parents usually refrain their children from going to schools as they require more earners to run their family and to survive.
2. The tribal people live in very remote and secluded areas with very few or no means of transportation. Hence, they are deprived of the light of education.

Currently, many NGOs and groups are coming forward to work in this field. If you are a UPSC 2019 candidate, you must acknowledge the initiatives of these groups. They are trying to build schools in remote tribal villages, where the children cannot only study in their own languages, but also stay and have a square meal daily.[4,5,6] They are also helping the tribal adults to earn their living by teaching them a few basic farming and handicraft skills.

In 1978, the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) was established under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 1984 to work for the social and economic upliftment of the tribal people of the country.

Furthermore, tribal people are a very important part of the Indian culture. Therefore, the government should take more steps to preserve them and uplift their living conditions by providing them with proper education.

II. DISCUSSION

Traditional medicine, as defined by the World Health Organization, is the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement, or treatment of physical and mental illness. Some traditional medicine systems are supported by huge volumes of literature and records of the theoretical concepts and practical skills; others pass down from generation to generation through verbal teaching. To date, in some parts of the world, the majority of the population continue to rely on their own traditional medicine to meet their primary health care needs. When adopted outside of its traditional culture, traditional medicine is often referred as “complementary and alternative medicine. Traditional medicines have been classified into four categories:[7,8,9]

Category 1: Traditional medicines that are prepared by a traditional health practitioner for an individual patient with fresh or dried raw materials, with a short shelf life.

Category 2: Traditional medicines currently used in the community that are prepared in advance and composed of crude raw plant materials.

Category 3: Standardized plant extracts prepared in advance and supported by scientific research.

Category 4: Isolated pure compound molecules from traditional medicines following scientific research.

Traditional medicine is experience-based, a culture-bound medical practice that relies on natural products to diagnose, prevent illness, treat disease or maintain health, irrespective of their explicability (Che et al., 2017). Every civilian community has a comprehensive system of health care based on its societal and cultural heritage. TM mainly utilizes the benefits of natural products like the plant, animal, and mineral substances. The mode of treatment is supported by indigenous beliefs, practical skills, and experiences handed down from generation to generation. Some of the best-known TM systems include traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), traditional Indian (Ayurveda) medicine, and traditional Arabic (Unani) medicine. Though these traditional medicines diverge in their therapeutic principles, theoretical background, and associated technologies, they converge at particular characteristics (WHO, 1999; Yuan et al., 2016).

1. TM applies a holistic approach that treats the human body as a whole and not a particular body part. It relies on the concept that every organ of the human body is interconnected with others. The emphasis of TM is on maximizing the body’s innate ability to heal itself.

2. TM are personalized or customized medicines encompassing a person’s lifestyle, mental state, physical activity, and even spiritual beliefs.

3. TM tries to balance several opposing factors of the human body.



4. TM focus on the use of polyherbal preparations whose exact chemical composition is challenging to elucidate.
5. Many of the traditional remedies are field-tested but are not explained well by modern medicine.

III. RESULTS

Unity in diversity is one of the most spectacular features of the population of India. India has the second-largest tribal population in the world. As per the Census 2011, the tribal population constitutes about 8.9% of the total population in India. The tribal people throughout the country have rich traditions, cultures and heritage with unique lifestyles and customs.[10,11,12]

Tribal movements like the Khasi-Garo movement, Mizo movement, Kol movement, etc. are integral chapters in India's history and struggle for independence. Be it the bravery of Gond Maharani Veer Durgavati or the sacrifice of Rani Kamalapati; the country cannot forget the same. The struggle of Veer Maharana Pratap cannot be imagined without the brave Bhils who fought shoulder to shoulder and made sacrifices. There are many Adivasi heroes who have sacrificed their lives in the struggle for the country's freedom.

Commemorating the sacrifice of Tribal freedom fighters and marking their legacy, the Union Government decided to observe the birth anniversary of one of the great Freedom Fighters, Bhagwan Birsa Munda, as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas with effect from November 15, 2020.

For the first time in the country after Independence, the art and culture of the tribal society and their contribution to the freedom movement and nation-building are being remembered with pride, and they are being honoured on such a grand scale. This declaration acknowledges the glorious history of tribal communities and recognises their efforts towards preserving tribal cultural heritage.

Further, on November 15, 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi became the first Prime Minister to visit Ulihatu Village, the birthplace of Bhagwan Birsa. In addition, the Prime Minister launched the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN), with a budget of around Rs 24,000 crore for the overall development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). The Mission will be implemented through the convergence of 11 interventions of 9 Ministries.

There are 75 PVTGs across 18 States & UTs who are living in 22,544 villages (220 districts) with a population of around 28 lakhs. These tribes stay in scattered, remote & inaccessible habitations, often in forest areas and hence a mission is planned to saturate PVTG families and habitations with basic facilities such as road and telecom connectivity, electricity, safe housing, clean drinking water and sanitation, improved access to education, health and nutrition and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

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. These include the conservation of their language, script and other cultural elements, ensuring their educational interests, providing economic safeguards and taking steps for political empowerment.

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.[12,13] 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 2019, 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 2019, 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 30.06.2019 across the country.

Educational Empowerment

Eklavya 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 2019).

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 2019-24 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. In addition, financial aid is provided to Voluntary Organizations working for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes for projects in education, health and livelihood.

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 2019-24 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, 2019.

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 2019. 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 2019. 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, 2019, 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.[12]

IV. CONCLUSION

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 2020), bringing down the gap between overall and ST literacy from 14 percent between 2001-2011 to 7.5 percent between 2011-2020. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at upper Primary level has improved from 91.3 (2013-14) to 98 (2020); GER for ST students at secondary level (IX-X) has increased from 70.2 (2013-14) to 78.1 (2020); GER for ST students at senior secondary level (XI-XII) has increased from 35.4 (2013-14) to 52.0 (2020) and GER for ST students at higher education level has increased from 13.7 (2014-15) to 18.9 (2020).

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.[13]

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