

Abstract

'Health is of universal interest and concern' (Forest Clement,1932). Every society has cultural objectives to prove whether or not there is a case of illness and whether or not individual is healthy. The concepts of health, disease and treatment vary according to the culture of a particular area. Moreover a particular culture of tribal area is guided by the traditionally laid-down customs and each member of the culture is ideally expected to conform to it.

The traditional tribal societies in India as well as in the world differ from region to region due to various ecological settings, socio- economic and socio-cultural reasons. Present medical anthropological enquiry was made to explain the concept of health, disease, medical system, and medical belief related religious practices, diagnosis and traditional way of treatment among the Totos of District Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. It was also highlighted the issues of the modern health care facilities, infrastructure and implementation of different treatment procedure and introduced health care programmes among the said population and area.

The introducing chapter discussed about the basic components of health, disease and treatment along with the conventional idea about Medical Anthropology. This chapter also highlighted the role of cultural anthropology in studying health care practices. From this section one could get an idea about the outline of the health and different Government policies for the tribes along with the problems of its implementation. Analytical discussion was given on scope, objectives and hypothesis of the present study. Methodological section gave a detailed idea for understanding the framework of the study.

Understanding about the village and the people was the prime objective of chapter-2. A detailed idea about the studied village and people was given including the demographic profile of the people. From this chapter one could know about the socio- cultural life of the studied tribe. A short note on the state, district and block will also give a better interpretation. The chapter also discussed about location of study, geographical character of the village, historical background of the village, origin of Totos, ethnic character of the village, infrastructural facilities available in the village, food and drinking habit of the studied population, condition of village (with special reference to house, drinking water, sanitation, electrification), cultural festivals, demographic profile, socio-cultural life of the villagers.

Traditional concept of health and disease as well as the indigenous way of treatment among the studied tribe was discussed in chapter-3. In this chapter reader could go through the supernatural beliefs regarding health and well-being of the community member along with the procedure of appeasement of different deities for protection from various diseases. Role and activities of the traditional healers are also written in detail. Knowledge about the indigenous medicine occupied a crucial part in this chapter. Case studies of patients who availed the traditional medical system are also stated in detail. The chapter discussed about treatment by traditional medicines (selected case studies), life cycle related rituals and occasions, ethnomedicines and their administration process, health related religious belief as

well as supernatural belief, health and worship of various deities, concept of taboo and totem, magico-religious practices related with health and role and position of traditional healthcare practitioners.

Chapter-4 was framed in two separate divisions. In Section-A the health scenario of the country and the different Government policies formulated for the amelioration of socio-economic status of the Indian tribal population were discussed in detail. At a glance the health infrastructure of the country was given for understanding of the forth coming section of the entire study. A discussion was also made on the overall tribal health problem.

Detailed discussion about the health facilities and programmes of the studied areas was given in Section-B. Treatment by modern medical institution and practitioners (selected case studies), the actual condition of modern medical institutions such as Primary Health Centre (PHC), Sub-centre, Block Primary Health Centre (upgraded rural hospital), and the nearest State General Hospital were given in detail. Within this chapter a small section was allotted to evaluate and discuss the role and activities of the modern medical practitioners, nurses, staff, and health workers. Case studies of those patients were also given who availed the modern medical facilities in different circumstances. Child health care practices, health hygiene, water supply and sanitation, family planning particularly among the studied people were evaluated in detail.

The present study was exclusively made to explain the concept of health, disease, medical system, medical belief, related religious practices, diagnostic process and treatment among the Totos of Totopara, Alipurduar Sub- Division, District – Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, India. The village Totopara was the only residence of the studied tribe. Supernatural belief is rooted in traditional customary ideas particularly prevalent in connection to health, disease and disease related symptoms and misfortunes. In terms of level of observances of different norms and regulations, differences were found between six various sectors. Understanding about the role of supernatural agencies behind the causation of misfortunes was also observed. Traditional healers have proved themselves worthy of trust. Prevalence of multiple therapeutic modes of traditional treatment makes the tribe distinct one. Pluralism is apparent in the therapy style by the healers. The studied tribe came under the umbrella of modern health care system after the establishment of Totopara Primary Health Centre in 1993. Almost 24 hours emergency service was provided by the PHC as reported by the villagers. Villagers from all the studied six sectors were reported to avail the facilities of Madarihat BPHC (upgraded rural hospital) and Birpara State General Hospital.

Simultaneous presence of pluralistic traditional treatment as well as modern medical treatment is reshaping the traditional concept of health, disease and treatment among the studied people. On many occasions, for the same problem, the traditional healers and doctors are consulted side by side. Wide acceptance of modern medical system among the studied people still needs time.

There are some possible recommendations for the well being of the community.

- Traditional concept of health, disease and treatment should be preserved and encouraged.
- Traditional medicine men using herbal medicine should be encouraged.
- Sub-centres and PHC should be more equipped and should be open in all working days.
- Government should be more careful to initiate any health scheme, keeping in mind the poor economic condition, education attainment, faith and of course distinct ideology.