

Abstract

Health is a prerequisite for human development and is an essential component for the well being of mankind. The World Health Organisation has defined health as a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity” (WHO, 1948). It is also asserted that health may be seen as a state of dynamic equilibrium between an organism and its environment.

Medical Anthropology is an area of specialisation within the cultural anthropology with the subject matter of medical and health beliefs and practices, or simply —the fusion of the two fields of medicine and anthropology (Grolig & Haley, 1976). It is simply the application of anthropological theories and methods to questions of health, illness, medicine and healing.

The perception about health, disease and treatment are not the same across culture. It varies from culture to culture as an integral part of human ecology and cultural ways. The tribal communities have their own beliefs and practices regarding health and diseases. Various studies explain that the traditional medical practices somehow influenced by religion, supernaturalism and magico-religious belief.

The present study attempts to explore the concept of health, disease and treatment procedures among the ‘Rabha’ population of West Bengal. In addition, this study will also evaluate the impact of modern healthcare system and implementation of different healthcare programmes and policies on them. The study also initiated and conducted among the Rabhas to know their distinctive cultural identity which can be explored through the aspect of health seeking behavior. One of the significant criteria for selecting the Rabha tribal community is for their age old affiliation with the forest regarding their health seeking behaviour which is now a day in a process of transformation because of the influence of the nearby dominant communities of Hindu religion and of conversion to Christianity.

At the very beginning, the first chapter focuses on different theoretical orientations as well as the tribal health scenario in the present day context. An analytical discussion

regarding the aims, objectives and hypothesis of the present study is also an important subject matter of this chapter. The chapter also focuses on the review of previous studies related with the present work.

The second chapter focuses on the administrative location of the six selected villages, their physical environment and infrastructural facilities along with a short note on state and district profile. The chapter also discloses the demographic structure and socio cultural life which helps to get a holistic idea about the community under study.

The third chapter focuses on the various health beliefs existing among the Rabhas population considered for the present study. Further, the occurrences of diseases and treatment categories (traditional, modern or both traditional and modern) opted by them occupies a crucial part of the chapter.

Traditional way of treatment procedures followed by the concerned tribal community is elaborately given in this chapter four. The knowledge of traditional medicines and detailed procedure of worshipping of various deities and spirits (including magico-religious performances) are discussed here. The chapter also focuses on the different traditional treatment procedures availed by the Rabhas in order to get rid of their ailments. Further, the life cycle and health related rituals also constitute an important part of the chapter.

The Chapter five is divided into two different segments. Section - A of the chapter highlights the health service scenario of the country along with different government policies formulated for the amelioration of socio- economic status of the tribal population. Section-B constitutes with the health facilities and programmes of the studied areas. Treatment by modern medical institutions and practitioners along with the actual condition and treatment facilities provided by the modern medical institutions such as Sub-Center, Primary Health Center (PHC), Block Primary Health Center (BPHC), State General Hospital and District Hospitals is also discussed in this section. The chapter also explores the various concepts, mechanisms and present day situations regarding Child healthcare practices, personal hygiene, techniques of family planning, water supply and sanitation particularly among the population under the study.

The present research has been conducted keeping on mind the medical anthropological perspectives. It is basically an exploratory study for better understanding of the various traditional and modern healthcare practices prevalent among the 'Rabha' population of West Bengal. In addition, this study also evaluates the impact of modern health care system and implementation of different health care programmes and policies on the concerned population.