Sustainable Health Practices of Tribal Community

Dr. Mosam Trivedi
Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology
VNSGU
Surat
Email: mosamtrivedi@yahoo.com
Mobile: 9426110948

Abstract:

This research paper explores sustainable health practices among tribal communities in India, emphasizing ethnomedicine, ecological balance, and community-based healthcare systems. Tribal healthcare reflects a holistic approach integrating physical, spiritual, and environmental health. The study highlights sustainability through reliance on biodiversity, low-cost treatment, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. India's tribal population represents a rich cultural and ecological heritage. Their healthcare practices are rooted in traditional ecological knowledge, offering sustainable alternatives to modern systems. These systems are preventive, community-based, and environmentally sustainable. **The Dang district** of southern Gujarat, a region predominantly inhabited by indigenous tribes and characterized by its dense forest landscape. The research focuses on how forest resources and cultural beliefs influence on sustainable health practices of tribal society on The Dang district. The study describe the profound ecological knowledge and sustainable practices that benefits their health.

Introduction:

India's tribal population represents a rich cultural and ecological heritage. Their healthcare practices are rooted in traditional ecological knowledge, offering sustainable alternatives to modern systems. These systems are preventive, community-based, and environmentally sustainable. The life of the tribal community has a close relationship with nature. The lifestyle of the tribal communities living in the regions of India is mainly based on forest resources. The legacy of their lifestyle has been largely preserved from generation to generation. Dang district, which has a forest area in the southern part of Gujarat, is notable for tribal population, and the tribal community in these regions is known as Dangi tribal. However, out of the 29 tribal communities of Gujarat, four major communities are mainly found in the Dang, namely Bhil, Konkani, Warli and Kathori communities. Traditionally living in the forest areas, the tribal community has rich traditional knowledge. Along with this, the tribal people living in the inaccessible forest region were dependent on the forest for survival and the primary need for food and health issues. In this regard, it is need to understand the health practices followed by tribal in a sociological context. Every society has its own specific beliefs systems about food , health, and remedies. That shows the spiritual, social and environmental practices of knowledge.

Research objectives:

The main purpose of this research is to document traditional health practices among the tribal of Dang, Also they survived in difficult weather since centuries. With the help of natural resources and natural remedies found in dense forest. the main objectives of which are

- To know the effects of modern times on traditional knowledge about health.
- To examine and documenting traditional sustainable health practices doing by tribal society
- To identify the challenges for sustaining their cultural health practices.

Research Methodology

The research is descriptive and interpretive in nature, aiming to analyse existing knowledge and contextualize indigenous health practices within broader socio-cultural frameworks. A case study methodology has been employed to gain a focused and holistic understanding of the Bhagat community in the Dang district. The case study approach allows for an intensive examination of specific cultural practices, rituals, and belief systems associated with health. Data were also collected through systematic review and analysis of secondary literature.

Traditional Health Practices

Tribal healthcare includes different type of health practices. 1. Herbal medicine 2. Spiritual healing, and 3.Preventive practices. Often this Knowledge is transmitted orally only. indigenous knowledge are emerging as a new research area for contemporary environmentalists and dieticians. Specially sustainable practices are world vision for development goals. The roots of sustainable development are strongly associate with tribes, Such studies are essential to make world better health practices a part of the lifestyle and reduce the environmental carbon footprint. These elements are inherent in the daily lifestyle of the tribal of Dang.

Dimensions of Sustainability health practices

- **Nutritional Practices:**

Food is a major sources of health. That develop the immune system of a person, as trival society have long hestory of their traditional knowledge and wisdom. That still associate in their daily life, in food, festival and relationship with forest and farming. They mainly consume millets and wild plants and vegetables in daily life.

- **Relation with millets:**

The main food of the tribal people in Dang district is Nagli / Nachani roti and urad dal, along with various dishes made from them such as nagli lot ni raab, kind of Soup made from ngali flour which is known as ghato in the local language. Urad dal bhujiyu, which is in the form of powder, is mixed with water and spices and taken as a chutney. Apart from this, other

foods include vari i.e. moryo, vari kondi, vari bhagar and vari ni raab, soya bean dal, chola dal, tur dal, kulid dal etc. They cultivate these types of crops mostly for their own consumption. However, now along with nagli, the millets are gluten free and high in their nutrition values, as Nagli has a good source of haemoglobin, they have different type of rice, they also been cultivated, especially with the marketization of agriculture, they have started cultivating rice and vegetables according to the season to earn profit.

- **Relation with jungle and wild plants:**

Tribal society has close relation with the forest, so fruits, roots, and herbs found in forest consume by them. That contributes to balanced nutrition and disease prevention in community. These diets are sustainable and resilient to climate. Plants and tubers growing naturally in the forest have been an important part of the tribal diet. Bamboo, mushroom, alim, wild vegetables and various types of tubers and leaves are intertwined with the tribal diet.

Vegetables and pickles made from bamboo found in the Dang forests, especially the young bamboo growing in the monsoon season known as vanski, are the specialty of the food of the Dang tribes. Apart from this, vegetables are made from various types of mushrooms growing in the monsoon in the forest such as alim, chikne, wathrata etc. They also use white musli and its vegetables (kavalini bhaji) in food. Apart from this, wild tubers and vegetables like tera, shevla, dihgade are also used in food. Along with other vegetables, including tandaljani bhaji, which is known as matani bhaji in the local dialect, they also use galka, goodhi, bitter gourd, kankoda, vaal, papdi, tuver, pumpkin etc. from the vines growing around the house depending on the season. So, vegetables like desi and sour okra are also used in daily life. And verities of leaf called Bhaji like vaalnu vardu, sour bhaji, kuhrulni bhaji, luni bhaji, chapani bhaji, kavali bhaji, chana bhaji etc. are source of iron used in food. These nutritious vegetables used to come in the forest as they are.

Along with vegetables, tubers naturally obtained from the forest are taken in food. This tubers are hard to cook. And often difficult to identifying in poisonous or non poisonous. So that Which are mainly known in two ways. Bitter tuber and Vaj tuber, the method of preparing these two types of tubers is different. The plant of bitter tuber grows in the monsoon season. After the rainy season is over, when the vine dries, the tuber is taken out of the ground. Which is cleaned and boiled.

In addition, a tuber called Dudhinlo which has medicinal properties. This tuber is fed to a new born child mother when she is not getting breast milk. Which makes the mother breastfeed. Halundo is another type of tuber which is eaten raw without roasting or boiling, the tuber called Aalu is grown around the house. Its tubers are sown during the monsoon season.

This Aalu is boiled and eaten with Nagli roti. Its Aalu vegetable and its chutney are eaten by making it. Apart from this, it is eaten by making a plate on the occasion of tribal festivals.

Many such wild plants and tubers have been used by the tribals. Which have medicinal properties along with food. As a result of living in the forest along with plants, meat and fish have also been the food of the tribals.

The Mahuda tree has special importance among the tribals. The Mahuda flower is consumed after drying. Tribal people often collect this flowers from the field. Oil is extracted from the Mahuda fruit, which has medicinal properties. Alcohol is also made from the Mahuda fruit called dodi, Which has special importance in the social and religious life of the tribals.

Oil and basic masala are minimal used in tribal. The desease because of high cholesterol are not much seen in tribal who are living in forest villages. However, there has been a slight change in it. With the increasing availability of oil, the consumption of oil among the tribal seems to be gradually increasing.

- **Herbal remedies and traditional care practices**

Some important social observations were recorded through case studies and interviews of persons serving as Bhagats in Dang district. Which are important to note from a heath and sustainable environmental point of view.

The tribal believe that illness is caused by divine magic, especially the Bhagat worship deity of that particular household. He does not believe in a specific deity regarding any disease. But if the patient is not sick for a long time, then God is angry, that beliefs are followed by tribal.

- **Conservation of forests and biodiversity.**

Basically tribal society worship the elements of nature. As a result, they have a unique relationship with the elements of nature. In the healing rituals of Bhagat, leaves, plant branches, tree bark, roots obtained from the forest are used. They never use flowers. They never pick flowers. Not only this, they do not wear slippers when going to the forest to collect plants. If they are wearing slippers, they take off their slippers and go barefoot away from the place where the medicine is found. By doing this, they respect the medicinal plants and also take care that they do not harm them. This practice is helpful to regenerating and conversation of that particular plant. Bhagats they are healer not doctor or businessman so that, they never store medicinal plants. They prepare medicine according to the patient's needs and give it. This profession is so holy for them so never think about a profit from this healing practices.

They collect them only in the morning after sunrise. It is forbidden to collect plants after sunset. While extracting the medicine, special care is taken to ensure that one's shadow

does not fall on it. An axe is not used to remove the bark of a tree or the roots of a plant, but a sharp stone is used to remove it. The bark of the tree is removed from the bottom to the top. After removing the bark, it is kept in the leaves. Mostly the bark is preserved in the leaves of the kesuda tree. It is strongly believed that only the medicine extracted in a ritual way provides effective treatment.

While preparing the medicine, care is taken to ensure that the leaves or other plants do not get mouldy. Also, special care is taken to the amount of water in the medicine prepared for the patient. Some herbs are crushed on a stone and given to the patient

The devotee sees the treatment of the patient as a service. Therefore, he never expects anything in return. But the patient gives whatever he can give or food grains. At present, the circulation of money has increased in the tribal area, so the patient has started giving money to the devotee as per his wish. Moreover, the main source of income of the village devotee is agriculture. Therefore, he is not financially dependent on this knowledge.

- **Community rituals and social cohesion**

The knowledge of sustainable health carried by hearbal healer of the community, they can be Man or Women but they strongly believing in this knowledge is a means of relieving the suffering of the patient. According to a belief, the medicine given by a devotee of one's own community, that is, one's own caste, is more effective. The members of the community believe so. If someone dies in the village, the devotee does not treat anyone on the day. They also have a close community relationship with each other. So that any health issue or problem happen with person relatives and neighbour are stand beside them. Community support are also part of sustainable health that underestimated by modern society.

Conclusion:

Tribal healthcare systems offer a sustainable, inclusive, and culturally relevant model. This system provide a sustainable and holistic model. That should be Integrated with modern systems wherever can be possible. That enhance our healthcare and reduce the unnecessary use of allopathic medicine. That leads to medicinal wastage and carbon footprint. Such research is necessary for the identification of indigenous knowledge, traditional, environmental sensitivity with good health practices are related to tribal identities.

References:

- A.B. Ota & N.K. Bahurani 'Tribal Food Systems in India' (2005)
- African Journal of Biomedical Research. (2025). Traditional Knowledge and Healthcare Practices

- Das manoshi, (2016), tribal food habits Tripura tribes, Tribal Research and culture institute
- Government of India. (2013). Traditional Medicinal Healing Practices Study.
- government of Tripura, Agartala
- P.S. Ramkrushnan, Ecology and Sustainable Development (2001)
- PMC. (2024) Sustainable Healthcare Systems for Tribal Communities.
- Rajyalakshmi p, (1991), Tribal Food habits, gain publication house, Delhi
- Vandana Shiva, Staying Alive (1993)
- Vidhyarthi Lalita Prasad, Rai Binay Kumar(1977) "The Tribal Culture of India" Concept Publishing Company, Delhi
- अटल योगेश(२०११) ***"आदिवासी भारत"*** रावत पब्लिकेशन नई दिल्ली.