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## AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY ON HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT IN RURAL SCENARIO OF KARNATAKA

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### ABSTRACT

*As so far man is concerned, environment is both natural and socio-cultural. Human health and disease, health-care system and bio-cultural adaptations are the basic tools of Medical Anthropologists. Medical Anthropology deals with multidimensional and ecological prospective, considered as one of the branch in applied anthropology. The present study conducted in Belgaum district of Athani Taluka. There are 684 households in the village and the number of total population was 3,568. The study used anthropological research methods to collect data. Here the study focuses on interrelationships between human beings and environment. Conversely, this study trying to know, in which dimension, socio-cultural factors (like; water and sanitation, toilet facility and personal hygiene etc.,) influence on health of the people and their environment.*



**KEY WORDS:** Health, Environment, Water and Sanitation, Toilet facilities and Hygiene etc.,

### INTRODUCTION

*Medical anthropology is a branch of applied anthropology that is concerned with the application of anthropological and social science theories and methods particularly on health and environment. Work of medical anthropology includes a holistic approach as their interaction with human biology, socio-cultural and environmental factors. Disease involves pathology and at another level, it is obviously biological. Yet, socio-cultural factors often play roles in causing diseases. However the way in which the patient's environment altered while he/she is undergoing treatment is purely cultural. Medical anthropology looks at cultural conceptions of the body, health and illness. It also focuses on health behavior as a way to learn about social values and social relations (Foster and Anderson 1978).*

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### REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

*Farther the study focused on water and sanitation, toilet facilities and personal hygiene, which are basic requirement of the villagers, to make their environment healthy. The environment in terms of 'sanitation' is an important factor affecting the health of a community, though it does not sometimes cover the whole range of cultural factors affecting health of that community. Environmental conditions directly influence the health of the people. Adequate, healthy and safe community water supply coupled with its surveillance, waste water treatment, water pollution control, proper disposal of domestic sewage and other wastes, control of rodents and other alternative hosts of disease, prevention of soil pollution by excreta and other substances, come under the purview of environmental factors affecting health (Rizvi 1991).*

*Health and healing is consisted as some form of environmental. National programs for the promotion of sanitation, public health, nutrition, housing, have been accorded high priority but a comprehensive and integrated view of environmental protection has not received significant attention. One of the main reasons for lack of disease control (ex: malaria) is inadequate sanitation. The US National Sanitation Foundation defines sanitation as the quality of living expressed in clean homes, clean farms, clean neighborhoods and clean community. Being a way of life, it must come from people, nourished as it is by knowledge and it grows as obligation and ideal in human relations. Accordingly, environmental sanitation is viewed a control of all those factors in man's physical environment, which exercise a deleterious effect on his physical development, health and survival (WHO, 1992).*

### STUDY AREA AND PEOPLE:

The present study based on an ethnographic fieldwork conducted in *Mallapur* village of Athani taluk in Belgaum district, Karnataka. *Mallapur* lies in the plains (*bayalu simi*) of Karnataka. The data was collected based on intensive and first-hand fieldwork, along with census-schedule, interview, observation and participant-observation, group-discussions, case-studies and so on.

In village, three religious groups (Hindu, Jain and Muslim) are residing. There are fourteen castes of people and are *Brahmanaru, Vishwakarma, Hoogaru, Lingayatharu, Maratharu, Kurubaru, Waddaru, Byadaru, Korvi, Madaru, Samagaru, Holiyaru, Jainaru* and *Muslyaru*. There are 684 households residing in the village. *Out of 684 households 611 belong to Hindus, 35 belong to Jain and remaining 38 households belong to the Muslims.*

### METHODOLOGY:

The preset study is based on intensive and first-hand field-work carried out in village *Mallapur*. The anthropological research methods viz., Census-schedule, Interviews, Observation, Participant-observation, Group-discussions, Case-studies, Discussions with key-informants were also employed to gather information about eating and food pattern of people.

### HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT MEANING:

*Based on previous works on health and other health related aspects such as illness, healing, personal hygiene, the present paper is try to explore possible meanings of a cluster of words viz., health, healing and environment.*

*In this context, it is important to understand what health itself means WHO (World Health Organization) defines "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not*

*merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (Park 2002:12). In general, health means “the state of being free from illness/injury. As health is an important factor in the human resource development. Health plays a pivotal role in increasing labor productivity and consumerist ability. Therefore any measure aiming at development in a nation must reflect the state of individual’s health of its citizens. Likewise, the word environment bonded with surrounding in which a person, animal and plants are living.*

#### **DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY:**

The factors which are considered under this study “health, healing and environment” include: water and sanitation (domestication of animals, disposal of house sewage water, and disposal of domestic refuse), toilet facilities and personal hygiene.

**Water and Sanitation:** *As a basic life requirement water is one of the sources of disease causation. Attention to supply of potable water is indispensable for good health and prevention of some of the common preventable diseases. There are various instances which prove that provision of adequate potable water can eradicated many of the common diseases like dysentery, worms, diarrhoea etc. Therefore safe drinking water and sanitation have enormous implications for human health and well-being. About 1.1 billion people globally lacked access to safe drinking water, and 2.4 billion people lacked access to sanitation in 2002 (UN report 2005).*

*In the village Mallapur, there are three sources of water namely open-wells (bhavi), bore-wells (bore) and a canal (bandar). There are seven open-wells and six bore-wells located in different localities of the village. Majority of people use open-well water for drinking because it is considered to be safer than the bore-well water. People feel that drinking water from bore-well leads to problems like formation of kidney stones and also cause dental problems, because the bore-well water is hard water.*

*For drinking purposes of the people in village, well water supply through tap for each street. The supply of tap-water is helpful to people as they can get water easily. The duration of water supply during summer (besige) is 15 to 20 minutes every-day and during winter (challigala) and rainy season (malligala) it is 30 to 40 minutes for each street. The duration of water supply depends on the availability of water in the well. People use tap-water generally for all their daily requirements. The people use water from wells and bore-wells, for drinking and cooking purpose particularly during summer. In case of shortage of tap-water, people use well water from the wells near to their houses.*

*People of Mallapur consider pure drinking water (swachha kudiyuva niru) as important and indispensable to lead a healthy life. They believe that water available from all the sources in village is clean therefore it does not cause for their health. Because they say that the wells keep getting fresh water and the well in the village are widely used and there is no scope for stagnation. According to them if the water in a well is not used for over a time, then that water is not safe for drinking. The doctors and health workers of PHC of Mallapur opinioned that if a person drink unclean water it causes illness viz., cold, cough and dysentery. According to doctors, unclean water is one which is turbid and they consider water with waste particles and insects also as unclean water.*

*Water, which has been used for washing utensils, clothes and bathing purposes, is termed as house sewerage water. Women of the household usually wash clothes and utensils in a corner of the*

front-door of the house or in the bathroom. Each house has a bathroom inside the house where usually people take bath and sometimes wash household utensils and clothes also there. The sewage water runs to the public drainage (gutter) through a small drain, which has an outlet in the bathroom in all the houses. There are open drains through which waste water runs to public drainage. Some houses have toilet facility and the water from the toilet also seeps to public drainage. Health educators and doctors opinioned that, the house sewage water usually contains some organic contents such as food remains and it provides a suitable breeding place for mosquitoes and other pathogenic bacteria.

During summer season majority of men take their bath at the public bore-wells and at open-wells and people also wash clothes and household utensils at these places. Because of shortage of tap-water during summer season people have to fetch water from open-wells and bore-wells for household work, and to make their work easier, they wash their clothes and household utensils at bore-wells and wells. Further utilizing the space surrounding the public water sources for washing and cleaning also creates water logging in the proximity of wells and bore-wells. According to Anganwadi workers and health works water lodging surrounding well, bore-well and street becomes a breeding place for mosquitoes and flies.

The indiscriminate disposal of the house sewage water reflects the lack of understanding of the role of hygiene and sanitation, knowledge of disease causation among the people. It does not however mean that people do not have their notions of what is hygienic and what is not. There are notions regarding hygiene and sanitation among people. Keeping the environment in and around the house clean, sweeping the houses, swabbing with the use of water, throwing away the rubbish, cleaning the cattle shed regularly, spring cleaning during certain festivals, by washing all utensils and clothes in the house are the aspects related to sanitation. However they differ from those held by the health-care providers and general notions of hygiene which are often influenced by the notions in the bio-medical practices and often also by western notions. In village, the educated people and how are having awareness about health and hygiene, say that, improper maintenance of sewage water creates unhygienic conditions which in turn cause diseases (roga).

Even though there is constructed drainage system in the village to provide outlet for the waste water from the village habitation. But during rainy water lodging in the streets (oni) is a common. The pits (tippi) and holes (thaggu) that are there generally surrounding the houses also fill with water and this water overflows when the pit overflows and spills over to the streets. People use these pits to throw wastes like plastic, papers and household refuse and such. During rains along with water the wastes also flow on to the streets. In case drainage near someone's house is blocked, the houses in the same lane find it problematic. According to the doctors also water lodging in the streets and drains and also, around wells and bore-wells, creates unhygienic environment and provides scope for pathogenic bacteria and mosquito breeding.

There is an open-space near the bus-stand and the immediate residential area surrounding the village. This is dumping ground where the household refuse and other wastes are thrown. House refuse consists of ash, rubbish and garbage. The ash is the residue of the fuel used for cooking and heating water. Dust, dirt, waste paper, plastic, clothes, metal, wood and glass comprises of rubbish whereas garbage includes waste products such as waste food, vegetable peelings and other organic matter. According to the health personnel, the disposal of the house refuse is indiscriminate in the village. Usually, houses are swept twice a day and refuse is thrown into the manure pit where the cattle dung is stored. Some people throw the house refuse either in the peripheral areas of the

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house or in the open space nearby their houses. As such the process of cleaning the houses creates polluting of the community environment.

**Toilet Facility:** Another important aspect regarding sanitation is the toilet facility. Studies carried out in India and abroad indicate that, human excreta are the cause of many enteric diseases: like cholera, dysentery, typhoid, paratyphoid, infectious hepatitis, hookworm and diarrhoea. Proper disposal of human fecal matter is an important aspect in maintaining the hygienic environment in the villages. Of 1.2 billion people practicing open defecation, India's share is a huge 665 million with 35 percent rural schools not having toilets and 20 percent lacking drinking water facilities (UNICEF 2005).

There are few houses in the village *Mallapur* (145) which have toilet facility. People who are economically well-off (*srimataru*) among *Brahmanaru*, *Maratharu*, *Lingayatharu*, *Jainaru* and other castes have toilets facility in village. There are six public toilets, out of that one is for men and remaining five for women. Generally people, who do not have toilet facility in their houses, go to open space/at the roadside and very few people use these toilets for defecation. Because people say that, if they go for defecation in public toilets, they feel a vomiting sensation and sometimes people also vomit because of the foul smell. People also say that instead of improving the community environment, public toilets are polluting it by creating unhygienic condition near the living space and also cause communicable diseases through flies. Educated people and doctors also opinioned that, flies are one of the most important carriers of communicable diseases like cholera because flies from toilets could also sit on food and water. As a result, when people consume such infected food and water, they suffer from different diseases.

Therefore, proper disposal of human excreta plays an important role in the improvement of health and environment in the village. According to the health personnel, the practice of defecation of the people reveals that, the existing practices of defecation are responsible for the creation of unhygienic condition, which causes morbidity and various health problems among the people. The main diseases such as, cholera, typhoid, fever and dysentery spread through the indiscriminate defecation.

**Personal Hygiene:** According to people of *Mallapur* hygiene means general care of the body. The practices with regard to personal hygiene include oral hygiene, bathing habits, cleanliness of hair, face, hands and feet and changing of clothes. According to doctors and educated people, oral hygiene is one of the most important aspects of personal hygiene, which includes cleanliness of tongue and teeth.

Healthy teeth and healthy tongue are necessary for a person because they play an important role in digestion food and all. Further bacterial growth in the absence of proper oral hygiene can cause various ailments. Therefore, doctors say that, taking care of the teeth and tongue is important in daily life of human beings. Oral hygiene depends on the method and frequency of cleaning as well as on the material used for this purpose. Majority of people in the village clean their teeth once in a day and few people clean their teeth twice in a week while taking bath.

It signifies that religious beliefs take priority over hygiene observances. It also indicates that even if it is seen from religious perspective, health figures into the picture because people believe that wrath of deity can affect one's health status. Irrespective of caste and economic condition, all

the people of *Mallapur* take bath including washing the hair on new-moon days, full-moon days and also days of festivals. This is so as the priest points out, because the religious rituals need to be performed only after the purification of the whole body from head to toe. Since all caste people worship deities on such days everybody takes care about bathing and then worshipping'.

Depends on financial condition people use soap, flour of jowar and bengal gram and soap-nut (*shigekayee*) to clean their body while bathing. The doctors in village opinioned that, people complain a number of skin diseases such as; scabies (*huruku*)/eczema (*esabu*) and itch (*kerisuvadu*) are very the common skin diseases found among the people, particularly who do not use soap while taking bath and also not take bath regularly.

Hygienic practices with regard to people, it not only includes bathing, but also washing their face, hands and feet twice a day, that is usually in the early morning and evening. In addition to this, people wash their hands and feet after defecation and also they wash their hands before as well as after eating food. People wash their feet after defecation without fail irrespective of caste and class background. Practices of washing face, hands and feet reveals that, people are concerned about their health because they believe that unclean feet and hands can cause diseases. Because, dust and grime on the hands and feet can enter into stomach along with food and cause diseases.

Another important aspect of hygiene is washing of clothes. The frequency of change and washing of clothes varies from person to person and it depends on economic condition of the individual. After taking bath the people wash their clothes and dry them either inside the house or outside the house depending on the season. Usually during rainy season people dry their clothes inside the house, whereas in winter and summer season, people dry their clothes outside the house.

As per the opinion of village ANM, many skin diseases are seen among the people because, these people put their clothes on grass, on pit and also near to drainage where many of insects and pathogenic bacteria are present. And hence people are prone to infection from fungi formed on the clothes as a result people suffer from many skin diseases.

## CONCLUSION:

The present study made an effort to understand the different influencing factors on health and environment. The role of economics, education as well as socio-cultural practices is seen to play a role in the environmental factors. *Environmental sanitation is vital for protecting the environment, improving health, alleviating poverty, enhancing quality of life and raising productivity all of which are essential for sustainable development. Sanitation is not only maintaining cleanliness but also protecting those sources of the environment which support and promote sustainable development.*

There is an urgent need to integration of water and sanitation access in the rural areas as experiences show that availability of water is one of the major drivers of safe sanitation apart from issues of behavior change. Proper sanitation is important to stay away from or healing diseases at both personal and community levels. A number of diseases in India occur due to lack of proper sanitary facilities, especially among poor and rural people. Therefore by providing proper sanitary facilities to people, these diseases can be controlled or healing and a number of deaths can be avoided. While the responsibility of proper sanitation lies with the government, it's equally important that every community and its inhabitants also take steps for personal sanitation. Thus different environmental aspects affect public health. Some are in the form of personal practices

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and some in the form of public behavior. However both have implications for health and result in different kinds of diseases. The present research shows that such incidences of diseases can be brought under control and can even be prevented through creating awareness among people.

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