Abstract

Health and well-being are the great concern of our contemporary era. While studying with the health situation of the tribals it has been observed that with regard to access to and benefits from the public health system the tribals have always remained at the receiving end of the system. The public health system has remained largely uneven and concentrated among the better endowed sections of the society. So the socially disadvantaged sections of the society have always lagged in this respect and the tribals have remained excluded. Tribal women have remained less benefitted from the development process and their right to health has remained neglected till today. Health rights have never been accredited from a rights approach and more so for the tribals. The developmental projects meant for tribal development have not been holistically treated to include health rights. Loss of vegetation cover and disturbance of the ecological balance have brought marked changes in the life style and health practices of the tribal communities. Deforestation and ecological imbalance have most adversely affected the health of tribal women and children.

The present research has been undertaken towards understanding the situation of the tribals in Malda district of West Bengal from a human rights viewpoint with special reference to their health issues. The study was conducted in thirty one tribal villages in four tribal dominated blocks of the district covering seven hundred and eighty seven (787) families from five tribal communities namely Santals, Malpaharis, Mundas, Koras and Oraons.

The study revealed the socio-economic condition of the tribal families to be backward and poor and the health infrastructures in the tribal villages were also inadequate and poor in quality and service. The benefits from the tribal developmental schemes were not equally distributed and there were contradictions in the response of the tribal beneficiaries and the government officials’ claims. The poor state of sanitation and drinking water facilities stood in the path of proper realization of health rights in the studied villages.