

Our community

Health in Chembakolli

In ancient times, the forest was both a store cupboard and medicine chest to the Adivasis.

- Traditionally, the Adivasis were hunter-gatherers, and their life in the forest offered them a varied and healthy diet. They hunted animals and birds, gathered fruits and berries, collected wild honey and caught fish. They also used wild herbs and plants to make medicines – tobacco leaf to cure leg pain, bitter gourd juice for headaches, and neem leaves for chicken pox.
- The Adivasis began to grow their own crops – rice, millet, vegetables, herbs and spices. But when colonialists began to clear the forest for tea plantations, they forced the tribespeople from their land. Constantly moving from place to place, the landless Adivasis were unable to find or grow enough food for their needs. And as hunger and despair set in, sickness increased.
- It was 200 years before the plight of the Adivasis was recognised. During their fight for land rights, it was also realised that the community needed medical help. A special Adivasi hospital was opened in the local town, Gudalur. Here babies are delivered, small children vaccinated and immunised, operations performed, broken bones mended and illnesses cured.
- The tribespeople pay 25 rupees (about £1.50) a year medical insurance, which covers all their treatment and medicines. Because the forest incorporates such a wide area, the hospital also runs community health programmes from eight different health centres, so that everyone can get medical help when they need it. These centres look after people from 200 Adivasi villages.

- Many members of the tribal communities have also been taught how to prevent sickness and how to give first aid. Since the hospital opened, the health of the people has greatly improved. They may still take garlic and cumin for a cold, or dried gooseberries for indigestion, but they also have their children immunised and go into the hospital to have their babies.

Talking points

- The 'Our community' section of the poster focuses on health. What does the word 'community' mean?
- What other parts of the Adivasi saying shown on the front of the poster does health link to?
- Why did the health of the whole Adivasi community suffer when their land was taken away? Why is it improving now?
- How has the hospital changed people's lives in Chembakolli?



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