As Gammi and Neela struggled to get the designs right, they were wondering why Tha [as Dr. Lalitha is known here] was keen on trying to get them to remember and bring back their traditional designs. Slowly, but surely, they were able to recollect what their grandmothers and mothers had done as an everyday affair, but now the younger generation had forgotten. Lambadi embroidery was exquisite, each design and application for a particular need and reflecting the moods, motifs and colors of their life. Gradually more women became interested in what THI was encouraging them to do through the Tribal Craft Initiative; especially when they found out that these moments spent in bringing out their creativity also brought them money.

Tribal Health Initiative is a Charitable Trust that had started working in Sittilingi valley of Dharmapuri Dist of Tamil Nadu 14 years ago. When they started work 15 out of every 100 babies died within one year of birth and many mothers died in childbirth. Buses were few and far between and the nearest hospital for secondary care was 100km away. We now have a Base Hospital which caters to more than 80,000, most of whom are tribals. We also run a comprehensive development program for about 10,000 tribals who dwell in 21 villages in 2 valleys.
Over the years **THI** began to view health from a wider perspective as the result of a mass community contact program 2 years ago. Now we are involved with the livelihoods of people, tapping into their local resources and planning programs around it.

This is how we got involved with the Lambadi women and their now nearly extinct craft of embroidery. Over the years the Lambadi women gave up their traditional dressing owing to the need to relate with the local culture. This trend led to a gradual decline in the number of artisans practicing the craft and is close to a state of near extinction. With practice the designs came back to them and they named their venture ‘**Porgai**’, meaning pride in their language, reflecting their dignity in reviving and perpetuating their tradition to share their culture with the world. This year they managed to export a decent shipment to Fairgrounds in UK, managing the whole venture themselves, with the money coming directly to their account. Women in the groups now earn a reasonable income on this spare-time work and are striving to become a self-sustaining enterprise.

**Lambadis are gypsies who have migrated from the Marwar region of Rajasthan and were wanderers till a century ago. Sittilingi is one of the southernmost destinations of their travel.**

The **Health Initiative** meanwhile gathers momentum each year. This year the Base Hospital, with the upgrade of facilities last year, has seen an almost 30% increase in the patients, deliveries and surgery; with word spreading amongst the tribals in the Kalvarayan Hills about ‘our hospital’ in Sittilingi. The Community health work is fully planned, implemented and monitored by the Health Workers, who along with the Health Auxiliaries are all local tribal women.

**This year we have started concentrating on TB/HIV in our valley with the help of the Government. Awareness programs for both diseases along with detection and treatment have started making a considerable difference in the health profiles**

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For details - porgai@gmail.com
The Farming Initiative showed a sharp increase in the number of farmers now taking up organic methods. Training inputs from CIKS that included vermicomposting and organic pesticides, better marketing and good prices have brought more farmers into the fold. This year we had 45 of them growing organic cotton that the Government purchased at more than 20% above market price, because of the quality. The Women farmer groups have brought processing machines for value adding to the produce, so that more percentage of the profit stays in the valley. Their food products are sold by THI with brand name ‘SVAD’ in select outlets in some cities [see our website]

for details - svad@gmail.com

Meanwhile the new Staff Quarters has been completed and families moved in. This was with support from FOS-UK. The new OP building, which MMKCT supports, is nearing completion.

Thulir, the Educational Initiative, has more tribal children now coming in to utilize its facility. 3 boys from the Basic Skills course have joined in to teach the youngsters. For administrative reasons, the education work will be under a separate Trust from next year.

Our vision is that the people of Sittilingi valley lead a better quality of life.

➢ To attain the highest possible level of holistic health
➢ To enhance their socio-economic status while retaining their pride, self-respect and self-reliance and ensuring their active participation in programs meant for their welfare
➢ To create an atmosphere highly conducive for the growth and development of local cultures and customs

Village libraries and story telling enhance willingness to learn

New village libraries in partnership with NEST have started off in all the villages. Here tribal children can take simple and easy to understand books, kept with the Health Auxiliary to their homes and read at will. Every month the community worker, sits with them to tell stories and get more children interested in books to increase their depth of knowledge.

Learning to weigh avoids getting cheated
New programs included the Medical Elective program for medical students; we had 3 students from UK who completed a month each.

We also were entrusted the work of HIV/AIDS education for the valley by the Government which we continue doing.

We have also been able to initiate and coax the Government to give Community certificates to the tribal youth, so that they can pursue higher education through Government scholarships and helps them get jobs.

Donors

Our major donors still are the large hearted public who form the FOS [Friends of Sittilingi], from India and the United Kingdom. BCF, NEST, ASHA, MMKCT chip in vital amounts to keep our programs afloat.

Plans for the coming year are:

- Starting basic health work in the Kalvarayan Hills so that a good number of primary illness can be tackled before they become serious and come to the Base Hospital
- Consolidating the farming groups and stabilizing the marketing activities.
- Craft Initiative to become independent functionally
- Start a workshop to initiate some basic technical training for tribal youth
- Education initiative to become administratively independent

This has been a very good year for us and we owe a special thanks to all of you for supporting us in so many ways. Do come and visit us to know us better. We would really appreciate that.

The THI Team

For more information contact
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office@tribalhealth.org
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Health Workers collect the 2007 Dr. Sanjivi Holistic Health care Awards in Chennai
**THI staff**

- 3 Doctors
- 5 Admin staff
- 3 Education staff
- 3 Community Workers
- 15 Health Workers
- 24 Health auxiliaries
- 3 Para-medical staff
- 4 Support Staff

**Board of Trustees**

- Dr Regi M George
- Dr Lalitha Regi
- Prof M Ravindran
- Dr Sara Bhattacharji
- Dr Indru Tupulur
- Prof N Kamalamma
- Dr Sukanya Rangamani
- Mr A. Arun

**Staff pattern**

- Men - 11
- Women - 49

- Highest salary - Rs. 15000 [doctor]
- Lowest salary - Rs. 1500 [fresh appointee]

Registered Public Charitable Trust No. 147/92, Dindigul, Registered under Sections 12A and 80G of the IT Act, Registered under FCRA to accept Foreign Donations
Friends of Sittilingi (FOS) activities continue to be enthusiastic and supportive this year. We are grateful to the numerous people who help us to work for the tribal community here and look forward to their continuing support.

Are you a member of the FOS? If not join the FOS, who are scattered all across the globe, or write to us if you would like to start one in your area.

Friends in UK can contact Dr. Carolyn Lomas [email: carolomas@gmail.com]

What we can use your donation for

Health: For the ‘Distant Healer Fund’ which is used to subsidise patients bills.
Farming: For creating a revolving fund for advance purchase of farmers produce
Craft: For giving training to the Lambadi women.
Corpus: For creating a reserve fund.

Please donate by Cheque/DD to
TRIBAL HEALTH INITIATIVE, SITTILINGI,
DHARMAPURI, TAMIL NADU - 636 906,

Please use the following form to indicate your preference

YES, I want to help and be a part of the change in Sittilingi
(please tick)

☐ Rs ............... to improve Health for tribal families
☐ Rs. .............for promoting sustainable Farming in Sittilingi
☐ Rs. .............for training of Lambadi women in Craft
☐ Rs. .............for the Corpus Fund.
☐ Rs................ for any other purpose you see fit

I am enclosing cheque/DDno......................... for Rs................drawn on

My address is

email
Signed
Phone

Cheques/DD may be made in the head ‘TRIBAL HEALTH INITIATIVE’, payable at SBI, Kotapatty (6244) or Canara Bank (1128), Theerthamala or ICICI Bank, Salem

Our thanks to ADS Fine Offsets, Salem for helping us print this report.

“It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness”. I understood the full meaning of this after seeing the work done by this dedicated team.

Shri Muthukumaraswamy IAS
Secretary for Tribal Affairs
Govt. of Tamil Nadu

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