



SWASTHYA SWARAJ

A People's Movement For Swaraj In Health

NEWSLETTER

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THIS QUARTERS' CHOICE

- Reflection of a fresh medical graduate
- Spine Camp
- Rural Creche Initiatives
- Educational Landscape
- TULSI Bytes



Issue 15

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Of all the forms of inequalities, inequality in
healthcare is the most shocking and inhumane.

-Martin Luther King Jr

The Strength of a Silent Cry

Written By Tijo Thomas

One memorable Tuesday, as our OPD in the Kaniguma clinic was drawing to a close, we received a call from our Kerpai clinic. The news was heartwarming yet challenging—a mother of two was on her way for her third delivery.



Fate had me stationed at the Kerpai clinic that week, and I was eager to embrace the opportunity, given my lifelong passion for obstetrics.

Upon my arrival, I encountered a mother who lay there, utterly exhausted. She had been enduring over 24 hours of labor, marked by inadequate contractions, leaving her too fatigued to push. We administered the necessary medical interventions, but after an hour, there was little progress. It was evident that a referral to the hospital was the best course of action.

However, the patient and her attendant refused. They explained that, even though an ambulance would take them to the hospital without cost, they lacked the means to return home. Their decision was to return home.

In that moment, the mother turned to me and softly uttered, “Do not worry; I will deliver. Previous deliveries took just as long.”



With remarkable determination, she rose from the table and took a squatting position, supported by a rope hanging from the ceiling. Her perseverance shone brightly as she channeled every ounce of energy into pushing the baby with each contraction.

Remarkably, throughout this ordeal, there was no screaming or cries of pain, a stark contrast to the typical delivery scenes I had witnessed. By her side were two supportive sisters who provided empathy and warmth, filling the room with an aura of tranquility. Finally, at 10:15 pm, a beautiful, healthy girl weighing 2.8 kg came into the world.

The next morning, both the mother and her baby were discharged, united and healthy. This experience was truly an eye-opener and a source of profound humility.

In the face of adversity, the strength and resilience of the human spirit shine brilliantly. These moments remind us of the incredible journeys that our patients undertake, and the dedication and empathy we bring as healthcare professionals make a difference.

"Giving birth is the most profound experience a woman can have. It is the only place on earth where you can feel another heart beating from inside of you."



A Symphony of Service and Hope- Spine Screening Camp

**Written By Viswanath
Jagannath**



The Spine Foundation (TSF) emerged from the profound dedication of Dr. Shekhar Bhojraj, who having garnered expertise worldwide in the evolving field of spine surgery, established India's inaugural exclusive spine surgery specialty unit at KEM Hospital. Driven by a commitment to his Gandhian values and a desire to extend medical care to the underserved, he founded The Spine Foundation. This organization aims to provide high-quality spinal care to those with limited resources, covering investigations, treatment, admissions, surgery, rehabilitation, and societal reintegration.

As TSF marks its 25th anniversary in 2023, it stands as a testament to its mission: "SPINE CARE FOR PEOPLE WHO CAN'T AFFORD SPINE CARE." Having treated over 60,000 patients and performed 1800 surgeries across India, TSF continues to exemplify its dedication to making a meaningful impact.

In this endeavour, TSF collaborated with Swasthya Swaraj and despite the hiccups, they embarked on a journey to address the sophisticated spine surgery needs in remote tribal areas. Overcoming challenges, the collaboration conducted a camp in Kalahandi, Odisha, supported by the teams' outreach efforts in all the Blocks of Kalahandi and adjoining districts.



Camp Overview: On October 6 & 7 2023, TSF team (Dr Shekhar Bhojraj and his 10 assistants from Mumbai) along with 3 doctors from St. Johns Medical College, Bangalore and one from Railway hospital, Nagpur showcased in Kaniguma village of Th Rampur Block of Kalahandi for the spine camp, showcasing a collective commitment to the cause. With 15 team members, the camp addressed general orthopaedic cases while concurrently the Swasthya Swaraj doctors managing the general OPD.

Outcome: 900 patients from 12 Blocks of Kalahandi and 2 adjoining districts attended the two days' camp in the upcoming small hospital of Swasthya Swaraj in the remote Kaniguma village. 554 were musculoskeletal cases who were screened by the orthopaedic surgeons and physiotherapists and 200 were specifically spine-related cases. 55 patients required spine evaluation and 3 needed immediate surgery. The experience reinforced the significance of providing assurance, physiotherapy, and targeted interventions for optimal care.

Challenges: The camp brought to light challenges, notably the difficulty in accessing MRIs, situated 350 km away. Additionally, two critical spine cases were referred to AIIMS Bhubaneswar for surgery, emphasizing the ongoing challenge of post-operative care.

Future Vision: Despite challenges, the camp laid the foundation for future spine care awareness, emphasizing the need for community education and intervention. Looking ahead, TSF envisions nurturing this initiative into a thriving resource for advanced spinal care. In summary, TSF's recent camp exemplifies its commitment to providing essential medical care to underserved populations, setting the stage for continued growth and impact.



A New Beginning: Rural Creche Initiative

Written By Kehfa

From its very inception Swasthya Swaraj Society has been trying to respond to the needs of the community and empower them along with providing quality primary healthcare. In our efforts we adopt a life-cycle approach, starting from care of pregnant



mothers, postnatal women, newborn, under-five children, primary school children, adolescent girls, young women and youth. In our search for solutions for rampant undernutrition among under-five children, Rural Creche Initiative was identified as a necessary step.

With unwavering support from Azim Premji Foundation, 10 creches in Thuamal Rampur Block were taken over. This initiative has allowed us to sustain vital early childhood education, health care, and nutrition services, benefiting over 150 children aged 7 months to 3 years from the marginalized tribal population. Our vision is to establish 50 more creches over the next few years, expanding our impact and making child daycare more accessible for disadvantaged groups across additional villages.

Our objectives are:

- Enable access to creches for all children between 7 months and 3 years in selected geographies.
- Ensure supplementary feeding, early childhood development, and facilitation of access to government entitlements.
- Identify growth faltering, underweight, and wasted children (7 months to 3 years), and refer them to a health facility, and follow up.



This crucial age window of 7 months to 3 years represents both the highest opportunity to nurture strong foundations for health and cognition and the highest risk if such an environment is lacking.

Introducing accessible daycare infrastructure through creche facilities is an urgent need for marginalized tribal villages, particularly in blocks like Thuamal Rampur in the Kalahandi district. With many women spending over 8 hours on arduous manual 'Donger' jobs, young children often lack close nurturing, hygienic living conditions, and developmental learning opportunities during these crucial formative years.

Creche schemes help address significant risks like malnutrition and lower future productivity. Trained local women caretakers oversee activity-based learning groups of 15-20 children between ages 7 months to 3 years within clean and safe community spaces during daylight hours. Besides facilitating women's work opportunities, these daycare centers focus on supplementary nutrition, age-appropriate play-way pedagogy, and regular health check-ups to shape healthier childhoods.

Tailored creche services empower tribal villages on multiple socioeconomic fronts by supporting reliable nurturing caretakers, community supervision, and equitable early childhood development—essential for human capital development. Their proliferation, especially across marginalized pockets, remains crucial.



Impact Story: From Donger labour to Creche caregiver

Amruti Majhi, a creche caregiver, shares her transformative journey. She expresses joy and pride in her role, highlighting the positive change in her life. Previously engaged in arduous Donger labor, she now earns more in a month than in a year. Amruti's newfound sense of purpose comes from serving children, and her positive experience has inspired other women to join the creche.

“Earlier I have to leave home in the morning at 6 and be back at 4 in the evening, and I have to work according to what my father & mother-in-law told me. But now I am serving children which gives me the feeling that I am serving God. Now, I get good payment every month for looking after the lovely children which I can use for my family's expenses” shares Amruti Majhi.

The creche provides rural women with an opportunity to stand on their own financially through caring work, allowing them to go longer without worrying about their children. This program is slowly changing lives in the community.



The Story of Solidarity and Business

Written By Adithya

During the Spine Camp, amidst the unprecedented patient influx for Swasthya Swaraj, a quiet yet flourishing business folded out in a corner of the hospital.

The TULSI girls had come prepared, to serve the overwhelming crowds. Over the camp's two-day duration, as 900 patients navigated their spine-related queries, the TULSI girls catered to 250 of them, their nimble efforts generating a revenue of approximately Rs. 10,000.

This, beyond the financial gain, served as a resounding testament to their decision-making, and their flawless execution, all achieved with minimal friction.

Witnessing this triumph, the coordinators remarked on a improvement in the girls' confidence, their business operations now imbued with a deeper sense of solidarity.

The quiet corner had become a testament not just to entrepreneurial ability, but also to their management skills.



Sometimes, the quietest corners hold the loudest stories of success



The Story from Non-Formal Education

L. Majhi's Journey with TULSI Education Program

Meet L. Majhi, a 10-year-old from Kidkadar village and a TULSI girl. Previously engaged in daily dongar work for livelihood, she had never attended school, struggled with currency recognition, and lacked basic literacy skills. In August, the TULSI cluster coordinator initiated a non-formal education program for adolescent girls. After just one month, L. Majhi can now confidently count, identify currency and coins, write her name, and read and write the alphabet—all thanks to the transformative impact of the program.

Journey from Farm Fields to Educational Empowerment

K. Majhi, a Tulsi girl from Semikhal village in the Kerpai Cluster. Initially confined to her family's small farmland for income, she faced narrow-minded views on the role of girls—seen only for early marriage and household duties. Without formal education, she lacked basic skills like currency recognition and counting. Despite her desire for schooling, family pressures prevented her attendance. In August, the Cluster coordinator initiated non-formal education, unlocking K. Majhi's ability to write her name and signature. Despite parental pressure for early marriage, her determination for knowledge compelled her to reject the proposal, and she now aspires to attend school.



Paper presentation

Held at CMC Vellore which delved into the crucial theme of "**Equity in Health**," with a focus on the challenging task of "Addressing Malaria in Tribal Areas." and a stall showcasing the impact of our initiatives like GSPG, DCHP.



GSPG- Nehela

GSPG inaugural which was held on 2nd of October in the Nehela cluster, were the primary function of GSPG is to address the high load of preventable communicable diseases and undernutrition in remote, hard-to-reach locations.



Guest Lecture

Swasthya Swaraj organized a guest lecture in the newly started SRM medical college campus. Dr. Shalender Bhasin, a distinguished Harvard Professor, delivered the lecture on the "Effect of Environment & Nutrition on Health and Aging," providing valuable insights into these critical aspects of well-being.



The Educational Landscape

Written by Deepak

In a recent exploration of primary schools spanning a two-week period in the Silet and Kerpai Panchayat regions, my objective was not only to observe but also to comprehend and address the challenges in the later part of time that were hindering the delivery of quality education to our younger generation.



Both Panchayats are situated in a remote forest area with extremely limited internet connectivity and transportation options. These villages exist in complete isolation, preserving their unique customs and traditions, which include activities such as mountain exploration and resource gathering from the forest—a practice crucial for their sustenance and livelihood.

However, upon closer inspection, a different narrative emerges—one characterized by a state of disrepair featuring a high dropout rate, inadequate infrastructure, malnourishment, and various other challenges within the community and schools.

During my initial visit to Serkpai, I participated in an ANC health camp where one of my team members and I visited a local school. To our surprise, only 13 out of the 46 enrolled children were present.

Further inquiry revealed that the children come from several kilometers away, making regular attendance a significant challenge. Unfortunately, parental lack of awareness about the importance of education exacerbates the situation.



In the midst of the health camp, an unsettling incident occurred as an older individual approached us, demanding money for intoxication. Ignoring him led to a barrage of abusive language, highlighting the community's struggles in terms of education and the pressing need for increased support and awareness.

The midday meals were subpar, offering only rice and a minimal amount of dal, which doesn't solve the problem of malnourishment. Additionally, the schools lacked essential facilities such as washrooms, kitchens, and proper hygiene practices, unveiling a stark reality that underscores the disparities between urban and rural tribal schools.

Compounding these challenges is the language barrier, with children using **Kui** while teachers employ Odia. Furthermore, a festival called **Toki Parwa** contributes to early child marriages, exacerbating issues of early maternity.

In conclusion, the exploration of primary education brought to light significant challenges like limited internet access, transportation issues, geographical isolation, and language barriers, followed by high malnourishment and poorly managed schools, necessitating urgent interventions and initiatives such as the **Health and Nutrition Promoting School and Non-Formal Education** Program exemplify resilience and hope.

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education." – Martin Luther King Jr.



Upcoming

Dry Snack production as part of the livelihood

As the second initiative of livelihood, we had planned for the production of dry snacks (Initially Peanut candy) for which the trial had been concluded with the help of 7 TULSI sathis who had formed a partnership for this production in the Kaniguma cluster.

The business awaiting to kick-start in the first week of January.



Ongoing Fund Raiser Campaign

Ready to **Brighten** the life of **Tribal Children?**

Join the Fundraiser for the **Preschool Education Programme**

Join hands with us to reach our collective goal of **Rs. 40,00,000/-** to light up the lives of **1500** tribal children!

Donate the money through www.swasthyaswaraj.org/donate/

For inquiries, email us at swasthyaswaraj@gmail.com

 **Swasthya Swaraj**
A People's Movement for Swaraj In Health

- Indian Donors can donate using the **link/ QR code**



- Foreign Donors can contact us through swasthyaswaraj@gmail.com



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