

THE REAL ISSUES AMONG TRIBAL WOMEN IN ATTAPPADY – A FOCUS ON HEALTH AND MORBIDITY

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INTRODUCTION

The word 'Tribe' is generally used for a publicly consistent component linked with a region and usually the members of which consider them as politically independent. In general a tribe possesses a distinct dialect and cultural traits. One of the most significant characteristics of the Tribal economy is that the Tribes have been restricted to low position physically and socially and they lead a remote life instead of being engrossed in the mainstream population. As a result they face circumstances of a withdrawal from their entire socio-economic milieu. This may take in the form of passive indifference and that often bar them from educational opportunities, social participation and admission to their own land holdings. This led them to alcoholism and drug usage, misuse of their women etc.

Once they enjoyed all kinds of privileges in their life from the forest and land. But endless alienation of their land and exploitation from mainstream society created all the issues that they face today in their life. The exploitation from mainstream society even resulted in losing their culture. When they lost their means of livelihood as a result of exploitation from the mainstream population malnutrition became rampant. This made them prone to all kinds of diseases. This has become a critical issue among the Tribals.

In order to ameliorate their economic status, the Central Government implemented “Tribal Sub Plan” (TSP) in 1974 based on the recommendation of S.C Dube Committee (1972). The TSP not only envisaged the Tribal communities' socio-economic betterment but also protecting them from all kinds of exploitation. For achieving this objective the Planning Commission guidelines clearly mentioned that Government should redirect the flow of funds, at least in proportion to Tribal population of the country. The Planning Commission and concerned Central Government authorities were linked for Tribal developmental activities. So they formulated new ideas, made changes in the existing policies in each period based on the socio-economic changes in the country. The purpose behind coordination of the different governmental agencies was to implement the Tribal growth projects and programmes at the right time.

Tribal life in the past and their connection to the history

Forest ecology and Tribal life is thoroughly related. Their original etymology is deeply entrenched in forest. Due to the exacting socio-economic system the habitat and ecology of Tribal communities are connected with their physical environment and their fondness towards the forest is close and direct. They appreciated the forest and they gave huge importance to the forest as their guard. The forest was and still is a multifaceted resource for their sustenance.

But the state of affairs has worsened much in difference to their expectation. Instead of experiencing conservation of Tribal life they experienced a life without any kind of support and peace. There are many reasons for this. During the last few decades large-scale decrease in the vegetation cover has occurred due to implementation of several developmental projects.

The Tribal communities used their land and practiced cottage crafts with the help of local raw materials, which they obtained from their forest environment. They were talented to construct their houses with timber, bamboo and reeds. But when they lost their culture, they lost their beliefs, thoughts, religion, folklore, world-view, sources of food, shelter, redress, veneration and romance. Earlier they had enormous opportunities in the forest for collection and sale of minor forest produce

such as shrub, fallen wood, small timber, bamboo, leaves, nuts, fruits, cherries, honey, resin, lac, herbs, hides, skins and feathers etc. But the large scale inflow of immigrants and the encroachers denied them this livelihood means. Economic situation of that society also improves. The most imperative is the boost in the age of marriage of the women in that society. In the Tribal settlements the age at marriage is a decisive issue, there happened a change in the view point of the tribes regarding their age of marriage. Beforehand the practice of marriage was in such a way that When a girl reaches puberty immediately she should marry. Now the Tribal parents began to think about the education of their children to some degree. Employment guarantee programmes, high wage rate, employment surety in construction works contribute a little for this change. They sometimes feel there is guarantee for their economic wellbeing.

Population and family welfare

Negligence of the state and mainstream politics, exploitation of the powerful communities mingled with the lack of education, denied access to land, food and health care made Tribal's life miserable in Kerala, as like in other Indian states. Despite epochal laws and Supreme Court orders, restoration of Tribal land remains a mirage. Number of widows are high in Attappady comparing with general Population. High use of liquor, opium, large scale suicides due to alchaholism are very common here. Addiction to alchaholism among men is the main reason for women to be widows. But this will not affect the child mortality because women are marrying usually at the age of 20. They become the mothers of three or four children within the age of 30. But the alarming situation is that the mother should hold all the responsibilities at home. They should take the role of a father to look after their children. Even in the middle of poverty she should find out the ways to lead their family.

T.S Naidu (2004) has studied about the socio-economic conditions of 300 Tribal families in Attappady. He mentioned in his study that of the 99 reproductive mothers in Irula communities, 66 were adopted Tubectomy, 8 were received vasectomy and the rest 20 did not received any birth control measure. Of the 31 Muduga families, 7 were received Tubectomy and the rest 24 were not received any birth control measures. Of the 24 Kurumba families 7 were received Tubectomy and 17 were not received any birth control measures.

Increased numbers of child death are common in Attappady over the last few years. There are many reasons for this situation. Lack of proper nutrition is essentially one of the prime reasons for this. All the neonatal deaths in Attappady are due to malnutrition and lack of basic health care and lack of social security measures and lack of Human Development. The same are the causes in general population as well, but in Attappady it accrues in an exaggerated manner (Dr.P.K Sasidharan2012). They lack basic facilities like toilets, safe drinking water and balanced diet. Effectively they do not possess land for cultivation, even if they have to engage in cultivation. The massive deforestation is the root cause of all the problems. There is an urgent need to prevent further deforestation at any cost in future to bring an effective measures for forestation to bring back rain. They lack basic amenities like safe drinking water, balanced diet, sanitation facilities and decent housing which are human issues as well. Lack of social security and lack of Human development are the real issues to be addressed. Basically by attaining education they can solve most of their problems to a great extent. They can bring back to their traditional mode of cultivation. For this they need rain. But due to deforestation they lost that vicious circle of life. Ultimately they are begging in front of the outsiders for their land. The result is the large scale alchaholism and they become very lazy, malnourished and sick. There was a sharp difference between the Silent valley with large number of high growing trees in and places like Nellipathy, Kottatahra, and Mulli having no trees at all. Whatever cultivation they do also destroyed by the wild animals which come in to the open space due to loss of forest. Whole problem in Attappady thus be arised from massive deforestation. In the name of developing them certain schemes have introduced and spent some money without any vision. Still they continued to suffer and get even more exploited. Shortage of money to buy essential items including the medicine and balanced diet, about which they have no ideas at all.

They have no land of their own now or even if they have some land, it is given on lease or sold and they work for others who are invariable from outside. The problems here are true manifestations of the health problems of India; the lack of balanced diet, lack of sanitation facilities, lack of hygiene, lack of safe drinking water and exposure to bad life style habits propagated by business lobbies and consumerist forces who exploit them. Health is a social issue and it cannot be achieved in compartments. We cannot improve the nutrition of the tribes alone, pregnant women or children alone, as health can never be achieved and sustained in compartments.

Table 1 : Total Birth Rate, Death Rate in all the Panchayaths under ITDP

SL.No	Name of the Hamlet	Birth	Death	Child death rate
1	Agali	17.1	9.29	49.18
2	Sholayoor	16.37	10.28	61.94
3	Pudhoor	22.4	9.64	41.66
4	Attappady ITDP	18.45	9.57	50.22

Source : Block Development Report, 2011

Current Status of Attappady

All the tragedies happened in Attappady in a period when the state's attention to Tribal welfare has markedly high. No less than 26 state departments are implementing projects worth Rs 520 crore, enough to pay each of the 9,433 Tribal families over Rs 5 lakh in cash. Apart from this, there is a Rs 100 crore project to build 2,950 houses for them, Rs 76.13 crore for 16 new roads, Rs 100 crore under the National Rural Livelihood Mission, another Rs 100 crore to provide free provisions for seven years and Rs 43.35 crore under the National Health Mission for medical care. Since 2011, around 3,229 houses have been sanctioned under the Integrated Tribal Development Project for the upliftment of Tribals. Since then why are the Tribals still in such a state? Infants continue to die, most of the men and youth are ravaged by unemployment and alcoholism, a kind of complete laziness in each corner of the hamlets and malnutrition is at crisis levels.

The common reason for the Tribal deaths is added to the loss of land and the destruction of their traditional methods of farming. The Integrated Tribal Development Survey says that only 1,309 acres of an original 10,796 acres of land have been returned to the Tribals (settlers from the plains now control most of this land, having duped the illiterate Tribals with petty cash or liquor. Present surveys in Attappady had identified 1,300 landless families and allocated an acre of land for 517 families. But titles for the land could not be issued because of the issues in other departments. As per the present records there are over 4,000 land dispute cases in Attappady. They lost not only their land but also their ways of living and subsistence pattern of life. The Tribals have been fighting for their land from many years. Many pregnant mothers and Infants continue to die in a state with India's best healthcare, a startling indictment of the failure of public health schemes. Many cases of infant deaths owing to underweight complications in these Tribal belts of Attappady happened due to the threat of these issues. The slogans rose to fight poverty and undernourishments in vein in many cases. Most of the malnutrition and infant mortality cases have been reported from the remote areas of Pattimalam, Vellakulam, Nellipathi, Kottamala, Kavundikkal, Palur, Vattalakki, Kallakkara, Thoova, Upper Manjikandi, Lower Abbanur, Kolappadi, Chavadiyur, Upper Mulli, Veerakallu, and Bhoothivazhi. The variations in the number of population in Attappady have dwindled from 90.26percent in 1951 to 34percent of the area's total population. In absolute terms, there are only 30,658 Tribals in 192 hamlets.

Increased use of liquor, ganja and smoking is very high in this area. They feel that this is the great failure in their life. All the day they are interested to sit idle at their home without doing any work. That leads them to stress and suicides. Mentally also they are not perfect. Many are mentally deprived persons. Apart from this lack of necessary food items also force them to live miserably.

Some of the studies indicate that there are nearly 17 percent of mentally deprived persons in Attappady. Mostly men die at very early age than women in all the hamlets. This is mainly because of the use of liquor, drugs and usage of other addictives are high among men than women. They spend a large part of their income for liquor. This leads to financial hurdles at home and use of liquor will affect the health condition also. In most cases there will not happen deaths but they are living in hell. The increased child deaths in Attappady were topic of discussion. There are many reasons for that. Many studies have done on that topic. Some of the findings of studies are cited here. As per the findings of the District medical office in Attappady there are many reasons for child deaths. They mentioned that: the causes of death were recorded for 33 out of 39 cases in the district reporting. Major causes include asphyxia, ARDS, aspirations and low birth rate, Development growth delay and intra Uterine Growth Retardation (IUGR) Congenital heart disease, pneumonia and meningitis etc.

The discussion topic of IMR is very high in Attappady i.e, 50.22. In Kerala the rate is 13 and in Tamil Nadu it is 24. Among these Irula has the highest IMR of 65.97. This situation is an alarming spread of the child death. When development matures automatically the social and economic conditions also should improve. But in reality here in all these situations there shows negligence in this area. If the hospitals in Attappady have good care provisions for pregnancy all these problems can be solved to some extent. Sickle cell anemia, accidental deaths, early pregnancy, high blood pressure are very common here. Some genetical disorders (National institute of Nutrition) growth rate in Attappady is higher than Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The immediate remedy is to protect their livelihood strategies and stop alcoholism in the hamlet, find out the genetical disorders and put forwards the solution for it, provide facilities for the mothers to stop their pregnancy if they have two or more children, resistance vaccinations should be given to the child, implement the ICDS Programmes in all the hamlets are some of the ways to reduce their deaths and to protect this Tribal population from dangerous situation.

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