A Peep in to the Tribal Problems of Wayanad with Special Reference to Kattunayakas

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Abstract: Wayanad is an icon of Kerala for its geographical peculiarities. It is a nerve centre of tribes in Kerala with thirteen tribal groups including particularly vulnerable tribes. Tribes are homogenous ethnic group with a specific sense of identity based on common language and culture. In the present scenario the de notified nomadic and semi nomadic tribes are the worst victims of neglect and oppression. Some of these communities are far away from receiving the benefit of freedom and social justice even though they are classified as scheduled tribes.

It is a matter of common knowledge that a number of welfare works under taken by the Govt. failed in the beginning. One of the reasons attributed to it was that the Govt. officials tried to push a programme ignoring the fact that it can have any diverse effect on other aspects of life. Therefore development among them is a challenging task to the Govt. Problems like land alienation and indebtedness, loss of access and control over the forest, involuntary displacement due to development project and lack of rehabilitation, ineffective implementation of panchayath acts, poor programme delivery on health and education and the welfare measures implemented for these groups are either have not reached them or irrelevant in their context. Thus it is really important that how we are going to help them, means and ends both should be viewed as interdependent. Thus tribal development is a burning question in Wayanad.

This paper is an attempt to reveals the tribal developmental problems of Wayanad from a historical point of view.

Wayanad – A historical outline
Wayanad is the nerve centre of tribes in Kerala with thirty two tribal groups including particularly vulnerable tribes. Tribes are homogenous ethnic groups with a specific sense of identity based on common language and culture. In Kerala, largest tribal population is in Wayanad. It is the district with the highest share in the adivasi population (about 38%) of Kerala. The tribes here still practices age-old customs and rituals and live a nomadic life. The tribal populations include Paniyas, Adiyas, Kattunayakan, Kurumas, Kurichias etc

The fertility of the soil and its geographical beauty attracted the attention of non tribes and due to their migration the sons of the soil became alienated from their land. This process dates back before the coming of Britishers. The Jains from Karnataka came to Wayanad in the 13th century. The Hindu Nairs from Kottayam-Kurumbranadu in Kannur district made an entry in the 14th century and established their feudal system. They were followed by the Muslims. There were large scale migrations from southern Kerala in the early 1940s. Chri stians came in the 1950s from Travancore. So in the last few decades there was a complete marginalization of the indigenous people.

The investment of foreign capital in plantations had been natural phenomena in India in the 19th and 20th century under the British rule. After the fall of Tipu sultan in 1799, the English East India Company extended it territorial authority to Wayanad. But they became super power in Wayanad only after the death of Pazhassi Raja in 1805.

By 1820, capitalist mode of agriculture was introduced in Wayanad and plantation in coffee and tea was promoted. Its major impact fell upon the tribal’s who were gradually incorporated in the peasant economy of India. The capital penetration to peripheral areas of Wayanad for agriculture and plantation had disturbed the tribal life and exposed them to pauperization and poverty (K.K.N. Kurup, 2006)

Tribes are leading a well adapted forest life, but large scale influx of non tribal settlers from the plains caused for rapid changes in the land use pattern, forest eco system and to their life and culture. The plantations marked a shift in agriculture from subsistence to capitalist forest products. The
plantation economy had a huge impact on tribal groups who had freely used the forest and hills that were now being converted to ordered productive landscape.

**Kattunayakas – an overview**

Kattunayakas, the particularly vulnerable tribal group were located in Wayanad and Palakkad districts. Their name correctly connotes that they were the nayaks (chief) of forest (Thurston, 1909). They were forest dwelling community. According to the census 1981, 1991, 2001, 2011, their population are 8803, 12155, 14715 and 19995 respectively. Of this, 84.5% lived in Wayanad district especially in Kattikulam, Kidangad, Pulkkatti, Pulppalli, Noolppuzha etc.

Kattunayaka tribes were primitive tribal group of southern states of India. They are one of the earliest inhabitants of the Western Ghats. They are one of the five primitive tribal groups in Kerala. They live very much in tune with nature. They are engaged in the collection and gathering of forest produce, mainly wild honey and wax. However the restrictions to protect native forests and wild life have forced them to find works outside the forests. Although willing to work for very low wages, unemployment and poverty is very severe among the kattunayakas.

Kattunayakas is also called as ‘Thenkurumar’. They were leading a well adapted forest life, but large scale influx of non tribal settlers from the plains caused for rapid changes in the land use pattern, forest eco system and to the Kattunayaka’s life and culture. As technologically less developed tribal community the subsistence of the Kattunayakas mainly centered on food gathering, Collection of minor forest products and fishing. Subsistence through hunting has almost disappeared in view of governments ban on hunting. In such circumstances they have no other alternative but to become wage earners. So during lean months some members do agriculture as land less labour.

Kattunayakas settlements are distributed both inside the forest and also in revenue lands. The maximum number of houses found in a hamlet is 22 and minimum is 4. Kattunayakas were leading a nomadic life in the forests, shifting their camp sites often and moving in small bands. The forest Department in recent decade compels them to settle down in permanent abodes.

A number of resettlement schemes failed because the officials could not envision that these tribal communities were living in the forested (habitual) surroundings from time immemorial. Their style of life including their religion, rituals, folklore, belief system and economy were deeply attuned to given surrounding. If they were settled in the resettlement colonies it would seriously upset their life.

Forest products are in all cases collected by the hill tribes and the poorer classes residing at the foot of the hills or outskirts of the forest. The plantations marked a shift in agriculture from subsistence to capitalist production. The plantation economy had a huge impact on tribal groups who had freely used the forest and hills that were now being converted to in ordered productive landscape. Labour recruitment for the plantation, the disciplining of the worker and the interference of missionaries forced them to migrate in to interior forest (kavita Philip, 2003). Thus the ecological equilibrium is making a serious impact on the life of kattunayakas.

**Review of Literature**

Edgar Thurston was one of the most eminent among the British ethnographers who spent his life for studying Indian tribes and castes. Through his book like *Castes and Tribes in Southern India* (1909) he picturised the tribes of southern India. K. Panoor’s ‘Keralathile Africa’ and (1963) ‘Keralathile America’(1989) picturise the pathetic condition of the tribes and the problems faced by the tribes due to migration. O.K. Jhonny’s ‘Wayanad Rekhakal’(2001) describes the real nature of Wayanad and it explains the process of land alienation and bonded labour. Migration and Economic Development of Kerala, K.V. Joseph(1988), Luiz. A.A.D. Tribes of Kerala (1962), Kunhaman. M , Bonded Labour in Kerala among the Hill Tribes of Wayanad- State and Society vol.3, L.A Krishna Iyyar’s The Travancore Tribes and Castes, article of Bindu Ramachandran Anthropology of Food and Food Technology- a Study of Kattunayakayas, K.K.N.Kurup’s- The Process of Tribal Land Alienation and Disempowerment in Wayanad - Kerala, provide valuable information about the tribal problems of Wayanad.  

**Data analysis**

SC/ST survey of Kerala conducted by Kerala Institute of Local Administration reveals that the tribal communities are even today struggling for their existence. Some of the highlighted areas of this report is graphically analyzed below
Total population of Particular Vulnerable Tribes in Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particularly Vulnerable Tribes</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koraga</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>1644</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kattunayaka</td>
<td>5137</td>
<td>19995</td>
<td>4.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caholanayaka</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadar</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>0.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurumbar</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>2251</td>
<td>0.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6771</td>
<td>26273</td>
<td>6.55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As per the report total number of land less and homeless population among the tribes in Kerala are 4614 and 8781 among these tribes Kattunayaka tribes consist of 317 and 587.

Land holding tribal families not having actual possession in Wayanad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Land holding families not having actual possession in Wayanad</th>
<th>Land in Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34540</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>410.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Land holding tribal families not having actual possession in Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Land holding families not having actual possession in Wayanad</th>
<th>Land in Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95451</td>
<td>1758</td>
<td>6652.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Land possessed by tribal families in Wayanad on the basis of pattayam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Below 5 cent</th>
<th>5-9 cent</th>
<th>10-24 cent</th>
<th>25-49 cent</th>
<th>50-99 cent</th>
<th>100 above</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3301</td>
<td>5050</td>
<td>4362</td>
<td>2334</td>
<td>2824</td>
<td>4607</td>
<td>22478</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethnic troubles

The problem of the alienation of tribal lands by non tribes are now the central fact of life for many Dravidian tribal communities like Kattunayakas(T. Madhava Menon,1996). In Wayanad due to agricultural colonization the peasant farmers migrate voluntarily to the areas reserved for the tribes and establish their camps and villages. Even though migrants are not legally allowed to buy or lease in land from the tribes, they do it through various means resulting in land alienation and other forms of deprivation.(M.S.A Rao ed. 1986).

The key concepts which I try to mention through this paper are migration, Land Alienation, Landless Labour, and Acculturation.

The term mobility is perhaps the most general concept in migration studies. It includes all kinds of territorial movements both temporary and permanent. Migration is having far reaching impact not only on the migrants but also on society at a large both in place of origin and destination.

Acculturation is a term that has been defined as culture change which results from continuous first hand contact between two distinct cultural groups.

Tribal communities were largely egalitarian, their concept of ownership were somewhat nebulous. The land problem had been intensified by the intervention of the British and the migration of peasantry to Wayanad from Travancore. The new settlers had often come in to conflict with the tribals in Wayanad, further the tribes who had no proper grasp of the value of their land holdings. The impoverished tribal owners orally leased their lands for temporary periods to the settlers, land owners, the Britishers and the tribals were converted to be a class of agriculture labourers . Their way of life addicted to drinking and tobacco made them easy to prey for such land sale. This land was alienated orally and based on documents to the new comers.

With the advent of the British, the concept of property in land changed completely. The settlement of the land as the property of specific owners was the basic tenet of British policy. A socio economic survey of the tribal community in Kerala (Govt. of Kerala-1979) reported that the rate of land alienation was at its highest during 1950’s in Malabar.

The capitalist mode of production in tea and coffee plantation along with the agricultural production of new settlers transformed the tribal as land less agricultural labourers.

British conquest of India and the resultant political and economic unification of the territories led to the spread of monetization to the tribal communities. From comparative isolation and dependence on exchange and barter, the tribal communities were brought in to the vortex of monetization in their relation with non tribes who had increasing access to them. This led to the emergence of money lender and tribal indebtedness. The rendition of labour at less than market rate of wages on an obligatory basis, at the call and the behest of the lender was termed as bonded labour. (T. Madhava Menon, 1996)

In Kerala the system of bonded labour was most widespread in Wayanad particularly among the adiyas and paniyas. This system was imposed by exploiting the religious belief of the tribal people. In the annual festival of Valloorkavu temple, traditionally all the tribal families gather and the land lord or the agents approach the tribal head man and pay an amount for tribal family. The acceptance of amount will entail a bond on oath before the goddess that the tribal family would stay in accommodation provided by the ‘master’ and work for him for nothing more than subsistence and customary gifts at holy and festival day’s .So the bonded labour is coupled with religious customs. Thus to the tribes it was not easy to break.

Even though kattunayakas were the self trained community among the particularly vulnerable tribes, they faced several problems like land alienation and indebtedness, loss of access and control over forest, involuntary displacement due to development projects and lack of rehabilitation, ineffective implementation of panchayath acts, shifting cultivation and weak governance and poor programme delivery in health and education and the welfare measures implemented for these groups either have not reached them or are irrelevant in their context.

Conclusion

In the present scenario, the de notified nomadic and semi nomadic tribes are the worst victims of neglect and oppression. Some of these communities are far away from receiving the benefit of freedom and social justice even though they are classified as scheduled tribes. Thus even today the
tribes are the worst victims of exploitation and their survival is a big question.

References


SC/ST State survey report 2009-2010