



**Differential perception of livelihood issues of tribal women: The case of
Attappadi the state in Kerala, India**

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Abstract

This research has been done on the basis of qualitative and quantitative data collected from primary sources and discussed livelihood issues of tribal women in Attappadi in a descriptive manner. Tribal women being the most vulnerable and deprived section, fall prey to various levels of exploitation and discrimination by the rest of the society. The very working of the development paradigm, by uprooting them from their niche, language, modes of understanding, livelihood etc., prove to be against their interests. Tribal women in the state of Kerala have usually enjoyed a higher social status in their own communities than Indian women in general. But the entry of non tribals to tribal regions and niche brought several changes in their life. The perceptions on livelihood issues based on importance were different for tribal women and the non-tribal respondents in the study. The major livelihood issues faced by the tribal women were poverty, alcoholism, inadequacy of food as per nutritional requirements, wild animal menace in agricultural lands, lack of electricity connectivity, and addiction to narcotics.

Keywords- *tribal women, livelihood issue, poverty, Attappadi, alcoholism*

I. INTRODUCTION

The tribespeople have been confined to low status and are often physically and socially isolated instead of being absorbed in the mainstream population. Psychologically, the tribespeople often experience passive indifference that may take the form of exclusion from educational opportunities, social participation, and access to their own land. It is well understood that malnutrition and related health problems are some of the most important issues facing the country. Socially marginalized groups like tribespeople, tribal women and children in particular, in many states are the worst victims of this problem. It is shocking to note that Kerala – a state with the remarkable achievements in human, and social (health) indicators – has excluded the tribal groups from its developmental benefits. It shows that development in human and social (health) sectors are as not inclusive as claimed by the state [1]. Tribal women being the most vulnerable section, fall prey to various levels of exploitation and discrimination from the rest of the society. The very working of the development paradigm, by uprooting them from their niche, language, modes of understanding, livelihood etc., proves to be against their interests. According to [2] livelihood is closely linked to socio-economic status, a term often used to reflect an individual's access to resources such as food, potable water, health facilities, educational opportunities, and housing. Generally, five categories of assets are identified as contributing to livelihoods.

II. METHODOLOGY

Identification of livelihood issues was made using methods like focus group interviews, participant observations and discussions with key informants. Secondary sources of information were also made of the collection and identification of livelihood issues. All the identified livelihood issues were then subjected to judges rating for selecting important and relevant livelihood issues for the

purpose of the study. For prioritizing the livelihood issues the selected list of livelihood issues were administered separately to the tribal and non-tribal respondents for indicating the priority and importance of the issues to be addressed by giving ranks. This was done to critically examine the differential perception of tribal women and non-tribal respondents. Which would provide information and insights to the policy makers and administrators about the appropriate developmental interventions and focus to be made while formulating the developmental strategies for tribal women.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Tribespeople in Kerala

As per the constitution of government of India the term “Scheduled Tribe” is used to refer tribal people. The Scheduled Tribe population of Kerala is 484839 persons as per [3] constituting 1.45 per cent of the total population of the State. Highest concentration of Scheduled Tribes is seen in Wayanad district (31.24 per cent) followed by Idukki (11.51 per cent), Palakkad (10.10 per cent) and Kasargod (10.08 per cent). These four districts together accounts for 62.93 per cent of Scheduled Tribes in the State. The coastal district of Alappuzha has the lowest percentage (1.36 per cent). There has been an increase of 0.63 per cent as compared to 2001 population census. Sex ratio of Scheduled Tribe population in Kerala is 1035. The Scheduled Tribes in Kerala are not only geographically concentrated, but are overwhelmingly rural.

3.2. Attappadi

Attappadi, one of the prominent forest regions of Kerala, is situated in the north eastern part of Palakkad district of Kerala. It is one of the 43 tribal development blocks in India. Attappady, situated in Mannarkkad Taluk of Palakkad district, is located 10° 55` 10`` and 11° 14` 19`` North latitude and between 76° 27` 11`` to 76° 48` 8`` East longitudes, is an area of undulating terrain, a valley sandwiched between Nilgiri hill ranges in North and Vellingiri ranges to the south (both having an elevation of over 1200 metres), with a total area of 745 sq km. The Attappady plateau has got a general slope towards eastern side and merges with elevated regions of Tamilnadu. Erratic pattern of rainfall, loose soils lacking in moisture, less vegetal cover, un-scientific tree cutting, agricultural practices etc. has rendered these lands an erosional landscape which paved way for slow desertification. The major river systems draining the plateau are Bhavani, Siruvani, Varagar, Kodangarapallam and Kunthipuzha. Administratively the Attappadi development block consists of three grama panchayats namely Agali, Pudur and Sholayur.

3.3. Livelihood issues of tribal women according to its priority and importance as perceived by the tribal women

Table 1. Livelihood issues of tribal women according to its priority and importance as perceived by the tribal women

Sl. No.	Livelihood issues	Rank
1	Alcoholism	1
2	Wild animal menace in agricultural lands	2
3	Land alienation	3
4	Addiction to narcotics	4
5	Depletion of natural resources like forest and water bodies	5
6	Inadequate transport facilities	6
7	Inadequate educational facilities	7
8	Inadequate medical facilities	8
9	Social exclusion and discrimination	9
10	Cultural invasion by non tribals	10

11	Gender discrimination at work places	11
12	Inadequacy of food as per nutritional requirements	12
13	Inadequacy of water for irrigation	13
14	Addiction to chewing stimulants like betel, pan masala etc.,	14
15	Lack of electricity connectivity	15
16	Domestic violence	16
17	Unemployment	17
18	Poverty	18
19	Ill health	19
20	Inability to utilize welfare interventions of the government	20
21	Nonreach of government supports and other welfare measures.	21
22	Financial exploitation by non tribals	22
23	Inadequate access to safe drinking water	23
24	Physical insecurity due to random entry of wild animals	24
25	Inadequate housing facilities	25
26	Nutritional insecurity	26
27	Forest fire during summer	27
28	Land slides	28
29	Sexual exploitation	29
30	Inadequacy of safe food	30

The table no 1 clearly indicates that the major livelihood issues as perceived by the tribal women, which are ranked according to its importance and priority are alcoholism, wild animal menace in agricultural lands, land alienation, addiction to narcotics, depletion of natural resources like forest and water bodies, inadequate transport facilities, inadequate educational facilities, inadequate medical facilities, social exclusion and discrimination, Gender discrimination at work places, Inadequacy of food as per nutritional requirements.

3.4. Livelihood issues of tribal women as perceived by the non - tribal social activists and extension functionaries

Table 2. Livelihood issues of tribal women as perceived by the non - tribal social activists and extension functionaries

Sl. No.	Issues	Rank
1	Poverty	1
2	Alcoholism	2
3	Inadequacy of food as per nutritional requirements	3
4	Wild animal menace in agricultural lands	4
5	Depletion of natural resources like forest and water bodies	5
6	Land alienation	6
7	Inadequate transport facilities	7
8	Inadequate educational facilities	8
9	Inadequate medical facilities	9
10	Skeptical attitude of tribes people	10
11	Inadequate access to safe drinking water	11
12	Lack of initiative and motivation	12
13	Lack of health awareness and importance of personal cleanliness	13
14	Rigid and closed cultural system	14
15	Gender discrimination at work places	15
16	Inadequacy of water for irrigation	16
17	Reluctance for social interaction	17
18	Absence of life skills like communicative skills, creative thinking, critical thinking, problem solving etc.,	18

19	Addiction to chewing stimulants like betel, pan masala	19
20	Ill health	20
21	Domestic violence	21
22	Inadequacy and access to quality education	22
23	Addiction to narcotics	23
24	Negative attitude of the mainstream society towards tribes people and tribal development interventions	24
25	Unemployment	25
26	Cultural invasion by non tribals	26
27	Nutritional insecurity	27
28	Social exclusion and discrimination	28
29	Non reach of government supports and other welfare measures	29
30	Lack of aspiration for social, economic & educational improvement	30

From the table 2 it is evident that poverty, alcoholism, inadequacy of food as per nutritional requirements, wild animal menace in agricultural lands, depletion of natural resources like forest and water bodies, land alienation, inadequate transport facilities, inadequate educational facilities, inadequate medical facilities, skeptical attitude of tribes people, Inadequate access to safe drinking water, lack of initiative and motivation etc., are the major livelihood issues of tribal women as perceived by the non - tribal social activists and extension functionaries.

A comparative analysis of these livelihood issues as perceived by tribal and non-tribal people highlight an important incongruence with respect to the perception of livelihood issues. A very important livelihood issue like poverty was not identified and recognized as an important livelihood issue by tribal women. In general poverty is the condition where people's basic needs for food, clothing and shelter are not being met. A rank of 18 was given by tribal women for poverty whereas poverty was perceived to be the most important livelihood issue by the non-tribal respondents. Same is the case of 'inadequacy of food as per nutritional requirement', wherein tribal women gave a rank of 12 and according to non-tribal respondents it is the third important issue for tribal women. This differential perceptions drive home an important aspect with respect to needs and aspirations of tribespeople. They are unaware of their real situation and pre-requisites for their development. They are still not ready to accept and utilize meaningfully the opportunities and facilities extended to them by the government and other non-governmental organizations. Their philosophy of life seems to be "living in the present and not concerned much about the future", it makes the situation worse. Social development entails the meaningful understanding of development needs on the part of marginalized sections. Converting needs in to felt needs is the professional responsibility of the extension professionals. The hitherto followed prescriptive approach of development as a part of trickle down paradigm could not inspire and motivate the marginal section of people to make use of developmental interventions. As a result efforts and expenditure by government on tribal development did not yield the expected results.

Majority of the tribespeople were addicted to alcohol irrespective of gender. Alcohol is easily available in the licensed shops and also is illicitly produced in some of the tribal settlements. The tribal people were spending their major share of income towards buying alcohol, leading the family to a financially unstable state, which ultimately resulting in problems like domestic violence. Owing to deforestation, large numbers of wild animals lost their natural habitat which made them in to invade the agricultural lands of the tribespeople. As a result it had become a herculean task for them to cultivate crops after driving the wild animals away from the agricultural lands. Land alienation is an important issue for the tribespeople as they lost their ancestral land which had been using for cultivation. Meanwhile they lost their land, they had stopped cultivating their traditional food crops like *cholan* (*sorghum vulgare*), *thina* (foxtail millet-*setaria italicum*) etc. that indirectly

lead to the inadequacy of nutrition in their daily diet. Lack of awareness about nutritional requirements and improper food consumption pattern mostly leaves the tribal women weak, anaemic and they suffer from various diseases. Land alienation had resulted in several serious problems among among the tribal people, *ie*; increased poverty, decreased employment opportunity, tribal migration, tribal labourer exploitation, tribal women exploitation, conflicts between tribal people and non-tribals, increased the disparity between the rich and the poor tribal people, developed extremism and naxalism in tribal areas and brought in law and order problem in tribal areas. Exploitation of natural resources like land, rivers, forest etc., on an increased scale became a reality, consequent to the invasion of non-tribals in to their land. Therefore the impact of immigration of non-tribals is multidimensional which totally destabilized tribal livelihood and natural resources.

The next main issue found was addiction to narcotics, same as in the case of alcoholism, irrespective of gender both men and women were addicted to betel, pan like chewing stimulants and a minor group of them were addicted to *ganja (cannabis sativa)*. These habits eventually resulted into physical, mental as well as financial instability in their life. Inadequacy of transport and medical facilities made their daily life so much difficult as anything else, especially in the case of emergency hospital needs. Though there are primary health centers, its services are very limited and not easily reachable. The standards of living of the tribespeople were remarkably low due to the inadequate educational facilities available to them. Education could bring in change in their world view and give them hopes for a better tomorrow. Another major issue of tribal people is social exclusion and deprivation. The main reason behind it is they are not socially organized and politically mobilized. Many social and historic reasons can be attributed to this. Keeping the tribespeople unorganized seems to protect the vested interests of the section of people who acquired land and other capital assets through illegal ways. The tribal people were always deprived of food, shelter, education etc. The non-tribals never considered them as an individual with their own identity. They always treated them as backward or inferior. The skeptical attitude of tribespeople was another major concern. The suspicious mindset of tribespeople were always been a barrier for their development. The previous experiences made the tribal people to look at everyone at suspicion and distrusted. A series of exploitations and cheating they experienced from the mainstream society for centuries reminds them to be suspicious about everything. That resulted in the strengthening of skeptical attitude of tribal people. Lack of initiative and motivation of tribal women also aggravate the situation. As they were treated inferior and exploitations of centuries made them to disbelieve the non-tribals and the programs and projects implemented by them for the welfare of tribals.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the study it is evident that poverty, alcoholism, wild animal menace in agricultural lands, land alienation, inadequacy of food as per nutritional requirement, addiction to narcotics, depletion of natural resources like forest and water bodies, inadequate transport facilities, inadequate educational facilities, inadequate medical facilities, social exclusion and discrimination etc., are the major livelihood issues of tribal women as perceived by tribal women and other non-tribal respondents. There exists a wide perceptual difference among the tribal women and non-tribal respondents about the livelihood issues of tribal women. The results of the study also proves that the prescriptive model approach of development will not apply in the case of tribespeople. For the complete development of the tribal people bottom up approach is needed.

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