

**DISPUTES IN LIVELIHOOD PLANS AND LIFE OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN KERALA – A  
STUDY ON ATTAPPADY**

*Dr.Haseena V.A,*

*Assistant professor Post Graduate Department of Economics, M.E.S Kalladi College,  
Mannarkkad, Kerala*

**Abstract**

What was the life of tribal women in Attappady like? Its scope and cost was full of mysteries. That is the truth. Tribal women live a life between reality and imagination. They are constantly struggling for livelihood. Yes, that is their biggest problem. Compared to the lives of other women in Kerala, tribal women are sad in every way. It is essential to discuss in detail what their problems are, what can change this, and who is behind it. Constantly they are living in the heat of this obvious experience. The main reason for the famine in Attappady is the uncontrollable impact of alcohol on their lives. The entire responsibility of the family rests on the shoulders of the woman. Pregnant women have to work hard until they have children. They have to go back a few days after delivery. The greatest hope of the tribal culture is the return of the land and nature. They are still in this state today. The biggest problem is getting them out of the power of the earth. One thousand nine hundred and sixty-one years ago there was an immense amount of land in the hands of the tribals. Many of the shops brought by the settlers in Attappady were a factor that the tribals did not need. At that time, the tribals also started relying on these new shops. Their livelihood depends on the shops from the time when they lived by farming. They happily ate the food items they got from the shops. They began to approach the forest for smoke and tea.

**Key words:** livelihood, sustainable life, malnutrition, land degradation

In East Attappady, most of the people are Tamilians and western Attappady, majority are Malayalees. In Attappady, Malayalees borrow tobacco, beedi and tea from immigrant shops. It is not uncommon for tribals in Attappady to end their lives in debt. Many even leased land in their hands to shop owners. This transfer of land was for one or two years. But by the time the land was to be returned, all rights to the land would have been transferred to the settlers. During the British rule, despite the threat of play, the tribals were allowed to gather forest resources and live in the forest. Even during the reign of the Nadu kings, the tribal lands were subject to encroachment by many players. Although the British came to India and laid down many places, it cannot be said that the land belonged to the British. Similarly, the encroachment of tribal land by the settlers is irrelevant. 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. 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.

**Malnutrition in Attappady**

There are a number of causes for malnutrition among tribals in Attappady. These are a combined effect of poverty, lack of employment, land alienation, failure to provide forest rights, loss of traditional agriculture, loss of indigenous food and lack of alternative nutritious food etc. They used to cultivate ragi, chama (bajra), thomara (horse gram), maize, millets and pulses and vegetables. Tribals also used to get a variety of wild greens, tubers, and meat of small animals from forests. A well balanced diet consisting of iron, carbohydrates and proteins were available to them. Tribals are forced to depend on the public distribution system (PDS). “But we are yet to adjust to this system.

We generally don't like rice provided from the ration shops," points out Kaali. "Most families cook rice and one curry once in a day and eat the same thing two or three times. There is no variety or nutrition in diet." Interestingly, out of the 10,160 ration card holders, about 2,000 were above poverty line (APL) category. They were brought into Antyodaya Anna Yojna (AAY) category after infant deaths. To make matters worse, the supplementary nutrition programme in Attappady was very poor. There are 172 anganwadis here but they were almost non-functional.

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 tribes. 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 tribes 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 cholam (sorghum vulgare), thina (foxtail millet-*setaria italicum*) etc.

Lack of awareness about nutritional requirements and improper food consumption pattern mostly leaves the tribal women weak, anemic and they suffer from various diseases. Land alienation had resulted in several serious problems among the tribal people, ie; increased poverty, decreased employment opportunity, tribal migration, tribal laborer 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.

### **Kerala tops in life expectancy, but its tribals are dying young**

This belt has been dealing with high infant mortality rates, severe malnutrition, premature births and low birth-weight for a decade now. All districts with heavy tribal populations—Wayanad, Idukki and Palakkad—show development indicators way below the state average. While life expectancy of the average Malayali has been rising over the years—it went from 62 years in 1970-75 to 74.9 years in 2011, a study by AIIMS shows the reverse in Attapady: The average life expectancy of an adivasi here has fallen from 70 years in 1975 to 66 in 2002 and came further down to 59 in 2010. The lifespan of the average adivasi in the country is 64 years.

According to the Iqbal Committee Report (2013), in Attapady, the average infant weighed around 600-800 gram. The mothers were anemic and lacked the nutrition needed to deliver a healthy baby. Most children here were affected by intrauterine growth retardation (IUGR) and 47 infants had died here in 2012-13.

### **State average for homes with toilets is 95%, but in tribal belt it is 49%**

Kerala's tribal population, 44.3%, lives below poverty line, according to the ministry of tribal affairs figures (2013). The state's average for homes with toilets is 95.4% but 49% of its tribal homes do not have toilets—the national average is 60.4%. Half the state's tribal population does not have access to clean drinking water while the state average for the same is 33.5%. Low mortality here coexists with high incidence of morbidity—number of persons reporting ailments in rural Kerala is 255 (per 1,000) and urban Kerala is 240 (per 1,000) whereas the all India average was 88 and 99 for rural and urban areas, respectively, in 2004. Lack of facilities like toilets and clean drinking water are a big concern for us because they lead to our community's declining health. Mechanisms of delivery of state programmes for health, nutrition and sanitation are ineffective in Attappady, said experts. "The health and nutritional status of tribal women and infants here is a problem. The state has failed to create an effective mechanism to deal with it. We need sincere execution of government schemes and

constant checks on and review of the operations of the departments connected to the health and well-being of Attappady children.”

Children eat their meal at an anganwadi (courtyard shelter) in Attappady. The block has an infant mortality rate of 66 deaths per 1,000 live births—comparable to conflict- and famine-ridden South Sudan—due to severe malnutrition and low birth-weight. Valli, malnourished and anemic, lost her child after birth due to low birth-weight. She recalled being asked to take vitamins and iron tablets because she was not fit enough for a pregnancy. The pregnancy kit that she received from the anganwadi (courtyard shelter) and the state’s unique Kudumbashree project ensured only milk and one meal a day. “In 2012-13, the tribal block witnessed 51 infant deaths. According to the UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) report (2012-13), Rs 12.55 crore have been sanctioned for various health programmes in Attappady but what got actually spent was Rs 35 lakh.

**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   | 4    |
| 2       | Threat of Wild animal in agricultural lands                  | 5    |
| 3       | Loss of land   | 2    |
| 4       | Poverty  | 19   |
| 5       | Financial exploitation by non tribals                        | 20   |
| 6       | Inadequate transport facilities                              | 17   |
| 7       | Inadequate educational facilities                            | 18   |
| 8       | Inadequate access to safe drinking water                     | 11   |
| 9       | Unemployment   | 3    |
| 10      | Gender discrimination at work places                         | 13   |
| 11      | Inadequacy of food as per nutritional requirements           | 14   |
| 12      | Inadequacy of water for irrigation                           | 16   |
| 13      | Land slides  | 25   |
| 14      | Lack of electricity connectivity                             | 21   |
| 15      | Inadequacy of safe food                                      | 15   |
| 16      | Sexual exploitation  | 6    |
| 17      | Addiction to narcotics                                       | 23   |
| 18      | Inability to utilize welfare interventions of the government | 22   |
| 19      | Non reach of government supports and other welfare measures. | 9    |
| 20      | Depletion of natural resources like forest and water bodies  | 1    |
| 21      | Inadequate medical facilities                                | 26   |
| 22      | Physical insecurity due to random entry of wild animals      | 24   |
| 23      | Inadequate housing facilities                                | 12   |
| 24      | Nutritional insecurity                                       | 8    |
| 25      | Forest fire during summer                                    | 27   |
| 26      | Addiction to chewing stimulants like betel, pan masala etc., | 10   |
| 27      | Social exclusion and discrimination                          | 4    |
| 28      | Domestic violence  | 7    |

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 of alcoholism, threat of wild animals in agricultural land, loss of lands, poverty, financial exploitation by the non tribals, inadequate transport facilities, inadequate educational facilities, inadequate access to safe drinking water, unemployment, gender discrimination at work place, Inadequacy of food as per nutritional requirements, Inadequacy

of water for irrigation, landslides, lack of electricity connectivity, inadequacy of safe food, sexual exploitation, addiction to narcotics, inability to utilize welfare interventions of the government, non-reach of government supports and other welfare measures., depletion of natural resources like forest and water bodies, Inadequate medical facilities, Physical insecurity due to random entry of wild animals, Inadequate housing facilities, Nutritional insecurity, Forest fire during summer, Addiction to chewing stimulants like betel, pan masala etc., Social exclusion and discrimination and Domestic violence.

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. They are just focussing how they live in the present and not concerned much about the future. It makes the situation worse. Development needs on the part of marginalized sections are the great need of the Social development and it needs in to felt needs is the professional responsibility of the extension professionals. But still the approach of development as a part of trickle down paradigm will not invite the poor people even to express their feelings. Consequently there will not arise much development on the part of tribal development.

Malnutrition continues to be a growing problem in most developing countries. Poor nutrition during childhood is one important factor impeding the physical and mental development of children, which ultimately propagates the vicious cycle of intergenerational malnutrition. The issue of child malnutrition is critical because its effects are not limited to the boundary of childhood but rather persist into adulthood. It silently destroys the future productivity of nations. Malnutrition increases the economic burden of a society because it leads to increased risk of death from infectious diseases, more severe infections, and higher case fatalities, creating an additional psychosocial burden. Although stunting has declined from 47% in 1980 to 29% in 1995, prevalence are still extremely high, especially in South Central Asia, which alone accounts for about half of the global problem. Studying stunting is important because it reflects the cumulative effects of socioeconomic, health and nutritional problems. Stunting is also a predictor of risk because it reflects the overall level of development characterized by poverty, low socioeconomic status. Classification of malnutrition based on z-scores (or standard deviations). This is the preferred expression for anthropometric indicators in surveys. It is the difference between the value for an individual and the median value of the reference population for the same age or height, divided by the standard deviation of the reference population.

Under weight, stunting, wasting are indicators used to measure nutritional imbalance resulting in under nutrition. Child growth is internationally recognized as an important indicator of nutritional status and health in populations. The percentage of children with a low height for age (stunting) reflects the cumulative effects of under nutrition and infections since and even before birth. This measure can therefore be interpreted as an indication of poor environmental conditions or long term restrictions of a child's growth potential. The percentage of children who have low weight for age (underweight) can reflect wasting (i.e low weight for height), indicating acute weight loss, stunting or both. Thus, underweight is a composite indicator and may therefore be difficult to interpret.

### Measurement of under nutrition

The following are the commonly used indicators of under nutrition that are based on anthropometric data.

- i) **Weight-for-age:** A child of a given age (in months) and sex is said to be moderately undernourished when his or her weight (in kgs) falls below two standard deviations of the median in the reference population, and severely undernourished, when his or her weight falls below three standard deviations of the median.
- ii) **Height-for-age:** Similarly, moderate and severe undernutrition can be ascertained for a given age and sex by comparing the recorded observation on height (in cms) with that of the median for the reference population.

iii) **Weight-for-height:** Gender specific and age independent norms are available on median weights for given heights. If the recorded weight for a given height is less than standard deviations (or 80%) of the median weight value of the reference population, the child is identified as moderately undernourished.

### **Unwed mothers in Attappady –veracity of the depiction**

Constant persecution and exploitation often led to the emergence of unwed mothers. The tribal study of Velli was conducted in the then one hundred and seventy six villages of Attappadi. 2,746 Ignorant mothers were found in this study. Many opposed it for fear that realities I would come out later. The survey had to be stopped halfway through. The submission of women is not a new phenomenon even in the historical pages of Attappady. In the past, after the war victory, an order was issued to bring a beautiful tribal woman to the palace of the King of Kozhikode. They did not know why they were taking this woman with her beautiful body and face. They made the most of this woman. When asked what she wanted in return, she replied that she wanted the whole of Attappady, and the king, impressed by her beauty, decided to give her from Mannarkkad to the Anakkatty area. The same is not true of the king's companions. Later, from Nilambur Mooppil nair to KP Nair, this woman and her family were hunted for the same. The brutal exploitation of women, especially tribal women, was a regular occurrence. No one was willing to speak out or react against this. Probably a factor as to why they're doing so poorly. Despite all the realities, the adivasis still smoke like those who know nothing. Here are many such hidden truths in Attappadi. Some are scattering. Some are digested alive. Even after the plight of the unwed mothers in Kerala tribal hamlets gained national attention

14 years.  
 "Tribal women succumb to the wiles of the non-tribal youths as their own men have become lazy and lost interest in their women," says sociologist Dr. S Uma Dathan. In some Indian tribes, a girl who is pregnant before marriage is an outcast. There are a few tribal communities where a man and woman are allowed to leave together before they tie the knot, just to make sure they are compatible. But no tribal community accepts a woman who bears the children of non-tribes. Ostracized by the society, most of them end up as targets for sexual exploitation.

### **Tribal's life expectancy falls in Attappady**

Life expectancy among the poverty-stricken tribals of Attappadi, where 46 children including newborns have died due to malnutrition. Average life expectancy of the Adivasis of Attappadi has shrunk by 11 years in the past 35 years. This disclosure has come at a time when certain ethnic organisations have suspected that the child deaths in Attappadi and the fecund poverty in the region were part of a genocidal programme boarded upon by the Government against the tribes in the State. Almost all tribal regions in the State other than Attappadi also are in the clutch of grave malnutrition. A huge decline in the number of people above the age of 60 years had been noticed in the last tribal census, which had found only 1,200 tribal above that age in the entire 187 settlements in the region. Recurring child deaths and fall in life expectancy are a very bad combination as far as the community's survival is concerned, say doctors. Recent reports had indicated that poverty has become rampant in the tribal Oors (settlements) of Attappadi due to the disappearance of traditional methods of agriculture and the particular crops they have been depending on for subsistence, their inability to adapt to modern cultivation systems and the excessive encroachment of their farmlands by settlers from outside. According to studies, many deaths had occurred in Attappadi between 1975 and 2010 due to cancer, tuberculosis and several kinds of viral diseases. It is said that serious disorders of the thyroid are seen in 90 per cent of the women above 35 years of age in the region. Non-availability of proper medical care is complicating matters.

### **References**

Basha and Chand, S, (1992), *"Impact of Forest Policies on Tribal Life in Encyclopedia of Dravidian Tribes"*, International school of Dravidian linguistics, Trivandrum, PP.45-50.

- Bejorn Johnson, (1997), *"Environment, Technology and Economic growth, Institutional Learning and Clean growth"* Literacy of congress catalogue-publication data.
- Binay Kumar Ray,(1979), "Man and Forest in Chotanagpur", quoted in Horizons of Anthropology in India, *Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol.32, No.4, Oct-Dec.
- Bina Aggarwal, (1997), *"Gender, Environment and Poverty inter links: Regional variations and Temporal shifts in Rural India "*.World Development Report, Vol.25.
- Blaikie,P and Brookfield, H, (1987), *"Land Degradation and Society"*, Methuen publishers, P.23
- Budhadeb chaudhari, (1987), *"Contemporary Society in Tribal Studies"*, Concept publishing company, PP. 67-79.
- Census Report, (1998), *Demographic Details"*, Census Survey, Attappady Hill Area Development Society, Agali.
- Chathopadhyaya and Kamal Dev, (1978), *"Tribalism in India"*, Vikas publishing House, PvtLtd, New Delhi.
- Joshi,S.C, (1987), *"Deforestation in Kerala, Causes and Consequences"*, M.phil dissertation, Center for Development Studies, Trivandrum.
- Joseph, K.V, (1988), *"Migration and Economic Development of Kerala"*, Mittal publications, New Delhi
- Kattakayam and John, (1983), *"Social Structure and the Changes among the Tribals-A study among the Uralis of Idukki District in Kerala"*, D.K publishers, New Delhi. P.78
- KAU, (1991), *"Package of Practices and Recommendations"*, Directorate of Extension, Kerala Agricultural University, Mannuthy, Thrissur.
- Khare, P.K, (1991), *"Social changes of Indian Tribes"* Deep and Deep publications, New Delhi.
- KIRTADS, (1982), *"Evaluation Report on Integrated Tribal Development Project"*, Kerala Institute for Research, Training and Development Studies of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, Kozhikode, Kerala.
- Nair, Viswanathan,(1986), "Land Alienation among the Tribes of Attappady", Kerala Institute for Research, Training and Development Studies of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (KIRTADS), Kozhikode, Kerala.
- Patnaik, N, (1972), *"Tribals and their Development"*, National Institute of Community Development, Hyderabad, PP.43-
- Paul, C.T, (1988), *"Tribal Economy of the Hill Tribes with Special Reference to Way and"*, Ph.d Thesis, Department of Economics, University of Calicut, Dr, Jhon Mathai Center, Thrissur.
- Planning Report, (2001), "Geology and Soil of Attappady", *Block Development Journal Report*, Agali.
- Sinha,V.P, (1967), *"Demographic profile of Tribal population in India"*, International Institute for Population studies.
- Survey Report, (2001), *"Forest and sources"*, Forest Survey of India, Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi.
- Survey Report, (2001), *"Hamlets Survey of Attappady"*, Hamlet Survey, Attappady.