

Living Conditions Of The Rehabilitated Tribal Community In Kerala: The Case Of Kadar Tribes

Jayasree Paul

Assistant Professor

Department of Economics,

Panampilly Memorial Government College, Chalakudy, India

Abstract: Historically, the tribal economy lived in close touch with nature and its resources. *Wachumaram* tribal colony was an outcome of the displaced tribal community from the deep forest to a colony settlement. The state forcibly displaced them out of their home land- vast terrains of forest, and compelled them to settle in modern houses with very minimal facilities. This study addresses the transformation they have undergone since resettling in this colony. This paper addresses the living conditions of *Kadar* tribes such as housing, food habits, traditional knowledge, current means of livelihood, education and Health. Although the tribes in *Vachumaram* tribal colony are isolated from the mainstream society, there are many open windows to interact with modern society. The living conditions of *Kadar* in *Vachumaram* is a glaring example of alienation and miseries experienced by the tribes in general.

Index Terms - Kadar, tribal colony, tribes, living conditions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kerala occupies the centre stage of debate on the attainment of high social development indicators. Despite Kerala's notable achievements in human development, certain marginalized groups, such as the Scheduled Tribes, continue to remain excluded from these advancements. In Kerala, they have an extremely deprived condition even if the state is exemplified for its outstanding performance in social development. They had their natural habitat, own culture, skills and knowledge congenial to their physical and social development. For them, the forest was their homeland from the cradle to the tomb. Forest supplied all their means of livelihood. In the course of time, their life preserving forests and livelihood resources like forest produces were invaded by modern civilization, leading them to extreme poverty. The state dragged them out of their home land- vast terrains of forest, and compelled them to settle in modern houses with very limited facilities. This paper tries to analyse the living conditions of *Kadars* who are the most primitive tribes living in the hilly regions of Athirappally forests and how they cope up with the artificial environment which is quite incompatible with the living habitat of aborigines.

TRIBES IN KERALA AN OVERVIEW

Tribes were the original human settlers in the forest; they protected the forest as a resource for fulfilling their basic needs. They optimally used the forest without hindering the natural habitat and ecosystem. The tribes had never experienced the problems of poverty, malnutrition and hunger so long as they were living in their natural habitat. They relied on forest as their source of diets, food supplements and varied resources. Their identity was intact before the intrusion of modern civilization. Their resources also vanished as the forests became agricultural and urban lands. With the excessive utilization of forest resources by modern society, the state begun to question the very presence of tribes in the forests in tandem with the decreasing stock of forest resources along with their growing deprivation.

Nearly 84.4 million tribes are living in India and they constitute around 8.2 per cent of the total population (2001 Census). The statistical records evidently proved that their number has now reduced substantially, as the forests reduced in size and their dependence on forest resources as a means of livelihood shrunk. The state of Kerala has a tribal population 3, 64,189 as per Census of 2001. The tribes are highly concentrated in 6 districts- Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad, Kasargod, Thiruvananthapuram and Kannur. The highest concentration of tribes can be seen in Wayanad district with 37.4 per cent followed by Idukki and Palakkad. In Kerala, 35 tribal communities have been identified as scheduled tribes who constitute 1.0 per cent of the total population in the state. The most predominant sects among tribes are *Paniyans* and *Adiya* who constitute 27 per cent of the total tribal population in the state. Communities like *Kadar*, *Paniyar*, *Vedar*, *Ulladan* and *Urali* are generally considered as indigenous and others like *Malaarayar*, *Muthuvar*, *Kuruchiyar* and *Korager* are settlers in Sahya Ranges. The northern part of Kerala is dominated by the *Paniyans* whereas the southern part of Kerala is dominated by heterogeneous tribal communities such as *Kanikkar* and *Ulladar*.

KADARS IN WACHUMARAM TRIBAL SETTLEMENT

Kadu means forest and *Kadar* means one who dwells in the forest. In their writings, Thurston and Rangachari (1909) mentioned that among the tribal communities, *Kadars* were the most backward in economic and social conditions. *Kadars* were included as one among the five primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) in the state of Kerala. Based on certain indicators like pre-agricultural technology, low literacy rates, and marginal population growth, they were identified as one of the particularly vulnerable tribal groups in India (2001 census). The number of *Kadar* people was 2145 according to 2001 census.

They are mainly found in Prambikulam forests of Plakkad district and Athirappilly-Sholayar region of Thrissur district of Kerala. In the past, the *Kadars* lived in the deep forest at the banks of Chalakudy river and led a nomadic life. The *Kadars* exclusively relied on forest and river resources for their sustenance. They were wanderers in the jungle and had no permanent settlement. "Their skin colour is generally dark; the average height of men and women is 5ft. The nose is flat and somewhat depressed. Their arms are proportionately long; they have deep chests which adapts them to mountaineering. They have great powers of endurance and can carry loads on their backs" (Iyer LKA, 1990).

During the British rule, the *Kadars* were instrumental in draining the forest wealth of the state. The *Kadars* played a crucial role as labourers of Cochin State Forest Tramway built by the British government for transporting timber from the *Parambikulam* forests to *Chalakudy*. They worked very hard to clear forests, laying tracks and transporting equipments. The British exploited them to extract forest resources mainly teak and rosewood from the deep forests. Some of them adhering to nomadic lifestyle moved to the *Athirappilly* forests and settled in regions at *Karappara*, *Muthirachal* and *Mukkampuzha*, along the banks of *Chalakudy* river.

During the 1960s, they were entirely displaced from the deep forest of *Athirappilly* region when the government initiated the construction of a power house and dam at *Peringalkuthu*. They were relocated to areas like *Vachumaram*, *Sholayar*, *Pokalappara* and *Anakkayam* under *Vazhachal* Forest Division. They were encouraged to engage in agriculture, gradually moving away from their traditional nomadic life. In the past, the native traders and contractors exploited the *Kadars* to collect forest produce like honey, cardamom, and bamboo for money, rice, and other goods for trading purposes. *Vachumaram tribal* settlement is located within the *Vazhachal* Forest Division of Thrissur district in the state of Kerala. This colony is part of *Ahirappilly* gramapanchayat (local body) under Thrissur district of Kerala.

FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The major question raised in the study is while the economic and modern life style forced the *Kadars* to sacrifice their traits and habits, could they receive any benefits or returns from this new settlement? Could they meet their basic requisites? What are the gains and losses of their interaction with modern society. The rehabilitation coerced by the state inflicted drastic changes in their tradition and values bringing them into frequent contact with modern society. This paper addresses their living conditions such as housing, food habits, traditional knowledge, current means of livelihood, education and Health. Although the tribes in *Vachumaram* tribal colony are isolated from mainstream society, there are many open windows to interact with modern society. The channel linking them with modern society is the Chalakudy-Pollachi road, an inter-state highway very near to the colony. In the course of time, they, shifted from wanderers in the forest to workers in plantation and construction sectors. The interaction with institutions like local body, *Vanasamrakshana Samithi* (Community Forest Management) and Bamboo Corporation facilitates close association with the mainstream society.

The study conducted a socio-economic survey among the *Kadar* community in *Vachumaram* tribal colony of *Athirappilly* village in Thrissur district. Major tribes settled in *Athirappilly* are *Kadar*, *Malayar*, *Muthuvar* and *Ulladar*. *Kadars* enjoy a significant majority compared to other tribes in *Athirappilly* panchayat. In *Vachumaram*, there are 50 households in the tribal colony. The present study made a population survey and covered all 50 households in the settlement. The study is mainly based on primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected among all the fifty households.

THE LIVING CONDITION OF KADARS IN VACHUMARAM

The living conditions of *Kadars* in Vachumaram is a glaring example of alienation and miseries experienced by the tribes in general. The following analysis gives an insight to the authorities to what extent these marginalized communities deviate from mainstream community.

Land Alienation and its Problems

Traditionally the tribal economy was self-reliant, commercialised and closed in character. The loss of land and deforestation transformed the tribal economy into market reliant, open and commercialized and highly vulnerable to external forces. In contrast to the self-reliant and contented life of the earlier generations, the present generation aspires for better living conditions of housing and enhanced social status (Mathew Aerthayil 2008). When the previously non-commercialised tribal economy became commercialized, they became increasingly dependent on the market for basic needs. Thus, money which is quite unknown to a society decades back, become an essential instrument of transactions and also the target of daily living. By birth, they are accommodated to live in forest and they are not skilled labourers. To get income, they were reduced to the status of casual labourers. Unfortunately, regular work is not always available and they remain unemployed for a greater part of a year. In Vachumaram colony, the tribes faced greater unemployment and they do not have income to purchase essential goods.

Their immediate needs they reported are drinking water and land for cultivation. The pitiable fact is that there is only one well for 50 households and the well is far from their settlement. During the summer season, ground water level in the well falls and they face acute water scarcity. Their most urgent need is land for cultivation. Providing land to the tribes is a controversial issue in the state. A major portion of their land is possessed by encroachers. Half of them expressed that they would like to go back to forest life if the government had permitted it. To them, forest was their heaven. They were displaced from their heaven and compelled to resettle in a small area where they had to fight with constraints-poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and, interventions of mainstream society.

Education

Generally, tribes in Kerala are backward in literacy. In Vachumaram, the majority of *Kadar* tribes are illiterate (74 per cent). The main reason for poor illiteracy among them is the distance to the elementary schools from their hamlet. Nearby Lower Primary school is situated at *Vazhachal* which is 30 Kms away from the tribal colony. Many of the respondents send their children to residential tribal school at *Mala* and *Vettillappara*.

Educational Background

Education Background	Frequency	Percent
College	1	2.6
Elementary	9	18.4
High school	3	5.3
Illiterate	37	73.7
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary survey

Occupation and Income

The traditional sources of livelihood of tribes are gathering of forest produce, hunting, basket or mat making and cultivation. The tribal groups *Kadars*, *Ulladar*, *Urali*, *Malapandaran*, *Kattunaikkan* etc are non-cultivators who resorted to collection of forest produce like spices, honey, seeds, fruits, etc. Thus, the forest was an inevitable and inseparable part of their life. In certain seasons, they go to the jungle for gathering forest produces such as honey, nutmeg flower, arrowroot, spicy leaves. They are very expert in climbing trees. Earlier, they went to jungle for meeting their subsistence needs, now they collect these items from the forests for trading in the market. They would collect non-food items such as honey, nutmeg, spices, leaves and arrowroots and sell them to the natives, tourists and retail shops. Even now they still retain a deep yearning for the nomadic way of life led by their ancestors in the past. In the new circumstances, this unskilled

community had no other regular means of livelihood, but, adapt to the conditions in the labour market and to choose the occupation available in the market. With the man-land equation being changed, there were disastrous effects on the tribal economy and they had to quit age-old traditions and habit.

The majority of the respondents surveyed do not have any regular job. They are mainly engaged in the collection of forest produces or bamboo cutting (48 per cent). Both men and women work as casual labourers (43 per cent) in oil palm plantations as well as engage in collecting forest produces like spices, honey, herbs etc

Occupation of the Kadar Tribe

Occupation	Per cent
Collection of forest produces/Bamboo cutting	48
Casual labour	43
Anganwadi	2
Business	2
Unemployed	5
Total	100

Source: Primary survey

The *Vanasamkrakshanasamithi* (Community Forest Management) in their area provides various opportunities to meet their means of livelihood. It is a village level body to facilitate local participation in the protection and management of resources. They collect non-timber forest produce such as honey, arrowroot and wild nutmeg flower which are sold to the *Girijan* society. Women are more interested in working under the *Vanasamkrakshanasamithi* than engaging in the works provided by the national wage employment programme called Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREGA).

Some of them sell the collected forest produce to non-tribals as well as tourists. Men who are engaged in bamboo cutting do not earn regular income as it is a seasonal activity. In some seasons, they serve as plantation workers, casual labourers and construction workers.

Taking into account the high irregularity of the income, their mean income come around even less than Rs.50 per day during the time when the survey was taken in 2010. Those who serve as construction workers and casual workers get Rs.170 per day and this income is not so regular. Here young women rose to the occasion and they work as wage labourers when there is demand. The bamboo cutters get daily income of even less than Rs.50. They are not interested in forming self-help groups.

Housing

The government provided 10 cents of land with single storied terraced buildings to each tribal family. Each building has an area of around 350 sq ft. The residential area is quite inadequate to accommodate a tribal family which has at least 3 generations. There is no electric connection in this area. All of them use solar batteries in their homes. The majority has radio, solar lamps and around 10 families have TV. TV, radio and lamps are run by solar battery. During the rainy seasons, with reduced sunlight these batteries often fail, plunging the community into darkness. The state has erected electric fencing around their colony to protect their houses from the attack of wild animals. But this fencing often fails during heavy rains leading to prolonged power failure which can last 5 to 10 days due to heavy rainfall. The most dangerous threat they have faced in the darkness is the attack of animals especially elephants.

The tribes live as in cluster called *Pathy*. Earlier *Pathy* was a group of 10 to 40 huts. The members of the *Pathy* were under the control of a headman, called *Mooppan*. He presides at the marriage, funeral and other ceremonies, and decides all tribal disputes, and visits all delinquents with corporal punishment, whenever necessary. They are averse to all kinds of innovations, and no innovations can be adopted without the consent of the *Mooppan*.

Health Status

Women, men and children are not found healthy. Especially the women and the children looked very pale, malnourished and extremely thin. Owing to the shortage in the availability of forest produces, the nutritional status of tribal women has been severely affected. Nutritional deficiency accompanied by insufficient food intake makes them victims of malnutrition and ill health. The problem of poor health is acute among women than men. The incidence of certain diseases like sugar, cholesterol, kidney problems, cancer which are very common among mainstream society is not identified among the tribes. But the incidence of high pressure, stomach pain and chest pain are comparatively high among the older people. During the survey, it was revealed that all of them are using allopathic treatment and the use of traditional indigenous medicines is very less. The medical camps conducted by the primary health centre, NGOs and other organisations made them slaves to the allopathic treatments. There is no hospital even within the premises of their dwelling area. *Vettilappara* Primary Health Centre (PHC) which is situated 50 Kms away from the tribal settlement is the nearest hospitable available for medical care. They just swallow capsules when pain comes without keeping a schedule or medical discipline. What medicine for what disease? They do not know at all. Three TB cases were identified and they do not follow any particular treatment. They said that they had many lifestyle diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes. They take medicines when doctors in the medical camps prescribe. They do not follow any particular consultation with a doctor.

Food Consumption

Earlier, the tribes had the habit of taking food items available in the forest like seeds, fruits, honey, vegetables, meat, eggs, etc. With deforestation, forest as a perennial source of food ceased to exist and they were compelled to resort to public distribution system or market for food. The vehicle from Supplyco (a government agency) supplies rice, pulses and cereals to them. Every family is given a ration card.

Women: The Backbone of Tribal Family

In tribal communities, women make strenuous efforts to pull their family from all sorts of distresses. Women are expected to take care of the family while their own basic needs and health needs are neglected. In severe poverty, the entire responsibility on women intensifies, as they are the 'bread winners' of the family. By tradition, women are pre-occupied with the responsibility of bringing fuel and food to the family. With deforestation, the supply of the above requirements faced a setback and the work load of women heavily increased. Along with it, women have to shoulder the heavy responsibility of finding an income source for survival. The physical health of women is badly affected by low food-intake, heavy work load and the decline in the availability of forest produce.

In Vachumaram, tribal men are addicted to smoking, use of addictive drugs and severe alcoholism. Hence the women have to bear the entire responsibility of bringing up the whole family with children and old parents. The living conditions are not at all congenial to women. Unhygienic surroundings, inadequate sanitary and drainage facilities and lack of basic amenities like means of transport, roads, provision of medical and drinking water facilities aggravate their agonies. Women stay in separate rooms during menstruation days. She should not have any contact with anyone especially men of her family. By tradition, both men and women were engaged in gathering forest produces and had no skills in other occupations, however, in the present situation, women are ready to work as casual labourers in various productive sectors. In certain seasons, they go to forest to collect forest produces like honey, spices and herbs.

Tobacco and alcoholism

Around 99 per cent of men and a considerable proportion of middle aged or old women are addicted to excessive use of tobacco. Most of them use on an average 10 or 12 times per day. The survey disclosed certain shocking facts. A tribal boy or girl starts to chew tobacco at the age of 10 years. Some women admitted that they were able to give up their habit of tobacco-chewing months back thanks to the awareness programme conducted by the Athirappilly local government. This calls for the urgent need of social intervention on the part of authorities and social workers to this issue. Tribes in this area are greatly addicted

to liquor consumption. Almost all men are addicted to liquor. A considerable number of women also take liquor. Many centers of the illicit supply of toddy are operating at *Puliyilappara*. The tribes buy liquor from the shops of *Puliyilappara* at abnormally high price. They also go to Beverage Corporation at *Chalakudy* which is 58 km away from their hamlet. The non-tribal people have taken advantage of the naïve character of tribes by giving liquor to the latter for seizing their land and cutting trees and transporting them through illegal means. Many cases were reported regarding the involvement of tribes in the brewing of liquor in the forests. Women, in particular, purchase liquor from men at inflated price. A significant portion of the income of both men and women is spent at illegal arrack shops. High alcoholism has ruined their family life and remained a block to their socio-economic emancipation and progress (Mathew Aerthayil 2008).

CONCLUSION

Wachumaram tribal colony was an outcome of the resettlement of *Kadar* tribe urged by the construction of a power house and dam in Peringalkuth. While Kerala is widely acknowledged for high social indicators, tribes still exist outside the stream of development. In this context, the government and other social institutions should take genuine interest in uplifting these communities. In order to save our historical identity and culture, rehabilitation programs for tribal populations need to be implemented; local governments have to take important steps like protective forestation to give habitats favoring their physical and social development. To conclude it is observed that like many other rehabilitation programmes, this also landed the tribes in deep trouble. They have started the mission but did not reach the end. They lost their habitat, culture and livelihood and what they got in return was not expected. Practically the rehabilitation project has landed these tribes from troubled waters to hot waters.

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