

Tribal Development and Forest Resources Management : Hindsights from Kerala

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ABSTRACT The problem analyzed in this paper is how to reckon with the problem of tribal development and that of the conservation of forest ecology. Using Forest Survey data 1991 the problems of Tribal Development has been analyzed, which show that more than 50 per cent of tribals are still depend on forest resources for their livelihood. But most of them are poverty stricken. Unemployment among the tribals is a major problem, even among the agriculture labourers who form bulk of the economically active population. Housing conditions are poor. Safe drinking water scarcity is acute. Diseases are widely prevalent. Primitive Tribes are not settled yet. The Joint Forest Resources Management cannot become successful without providing the basic development means to the tribals residing in forests. The programmes of conservation of forests and environmental stability are to be integrated with the programmes of tribal development.

INTRODUCTION

The problems of forest development is intrinsically related to the problems of livelihood of the forest dwellers – mainly, the Tribals. The tribals depend on forest for fifty per cent of their food like tubers, edible roots and flowers, etc. About 50 per cent of parks and sanctuaries in India (521) have human habitations. The Wild Life Act forbids for human habitations inside the forests, which has deprived the tribals for access to the forest produce inside the sanctuaries. Also, the killing of wild animals has become a threat to both life and property of the tribals inside the forest. The problem is how the forest dependent tribals can earn their livelihood from the forest resources within the constraints of Forest Protection Act and development programmes.

In fact the Forest Development programmes initiated by the government had isolated and marginalized the tribal people out of their forest existence. This has created problems for their life within the forest ecosystem. The development of wild life and Wild Life sanctuaries, tourist spots, fisheries and aquaculture, construction of roads

and buildings and other infra-structure for forest resources management have isolated the tribals from the main stream of development. The tribal programmes of development have been often not fully utilized the resources for the purpose. Sometimes the benefits have been "cornered" by the influential 'group', who are mostly in contact with the mainstream organizers of development programmes. Also, the stages of development of different tribes differ in terms of their settlement pattern and means of livelihood available. Therefore there need different approach to the development of tribal groups and management of resources for their livelihood.

In the present paper, an attempt is made to explore the possibilities of developing the tribals, while managing the resources of forest within its own ecosystem.

THE FOREST ECOSYSTEM AND TRIBAL LIFE

The ecosystem of forest has an intimate relationship with the life of forest dwellers. On the average 26.48 per cent of state's geographical area has been under forest cover. The national average of forest cover required is 33 per cent of the total geographical area. Two districts in the state, such as Kollam and Idukki have a forest cover of 49 to 50 per cent (Table 1). Districts like Thrissur and Palakkad have more than 20 per cent of forest cover. The distribution of tribal population of these districts invariably differ with respect to the geographical coverage of respective districts.

The population of tribals in Kerala is 3,20,867 as per 1991 census, who form about 1.1 per cent of the total population in the state. Majority of the tribal community is residing in the Wayanad district (35.84%). The other districts in the state, which have high concentration of tribal

Table 1 : Forest cover and tribal population in Kerala, 1991

S.No.	District	Forest cover (1991 Assessment) (Area in acres)				Population 1991		
		Dense	Open	Total	Percentage cover	Male	Female	Total
1.	Alappuzha	7	-	7	0.37	1407	1394	2801 (0.87)
2.	Kannur	-	-	-	-	9167	9076	18243 (5.68)
3.	Kozhikode	1322	356	1678	17.96	2654	2753	5407 (1.69)
4.	Wayanad	-	-	-	-	57386	57583	114909 (35.82)
5.	Ernakulam	251	21	272	11.29	2551	2390	4941 (1.54)
6.	Pathanamthitta	-	-	-	-	3459	3463	6922 (2.26)
7.	Malappuram	724	103	827	22.50	5213	5392	10555 (3.29)
8.	Palakkad	945	428	1373	31.26	17927	17538	35465 (11.05)
9.	Kollam	1755	510	2265	49.02	1943	1941	3884 (1.21)
10.	Trissur	807	42	849	28.0	1990	2061	4051 (1.26)
11.	Thiruvananthapuram	317	77	394	17.97	7860	8321	16181 (5.04)
12.	Idukki	2226	310	2536	50.10	25512	24757	50269 (15.66)
Total		8421	1871	10292	26.48	160812	160155	320967 (100.00)

Sources : 1. The State of Forest Report 1991, Govt. of India. Forest Survey of India (Ministry of Environment and Forests 25, Subhash Road, Dehra Dun)

2. Census of India, Kerala 1991

population are Idukki (15.66%), Palakkad (11.05%), Kasaragod (9.12%), Kannur and Kottayam (5.6%). Kannur, Kozhikode and Wayanad have about 18 per cent of forest cover and are inhabited by most of the tribal communities, who are 35 in number in the state. Idukki district has a forest cover of 50.1 per cent and has a tribal population of 15.6 per cent. Similarly, Palakkad has a forest cover of 31.2 per cent, while, the tribal population is about 11.05 per cent. Whereas, Kollam, having a forest cover of 49 per cent has only a population concentration of 1.2 per cent. Although, there is an apparent relation between the population concentration and geographical coverage of population, it cannot be generalised in the state as a whole.

The distribution of various tribal communities (altogether 35) in different districts shows varying concentrations of tribal communities. The district Wayanad is mainly concentrated by Kurichiyars, Kurumbas, Paniyas, Kattunaikans and Adiyas. The district Idukki, has concentration of malai Arayans, Palliyans, Ulladans, Uralys, Hill Pulayans, and Mannans. The district Pathanamthitta having a high concentration of Mala Vedans, Mannans, Uralys, Malayarayans and Malampandarams. The district Thiruvananthapuram is mainly concentrated by the tribal community of Kanikkars. While Kollam is mainly concentrated by Malai Vedans and Kanikkars. The main tribes in Palakkad district are Kurumbas, Mudugar and Irulas. Malappuram

district has a concentration of Paniyas, Kattunaikans and Eravallans. Kannur and Kozhikode have the concentration of Maratis and Paniya tribes.

Paniyas constitute the predominant tribal community in the state who form about 23.37% among all the tribal communities in the state. (Socio-Eco Survey 1976-78) Malayarayans are the next largest community (12%). The Kurichiyas and Irulas constitute about 7 per cent of the tribal communities in the State.

The communities like Adiyans, Muthuvans, Ulladans and Kurumbas form about 4 per cent each among the tribals. Whereas Kattunaikans, Mannans, Uralis constitute 2% each among the total tribal population. The Cholanaiikans and Kader constitute the primitive tribes who are very few in number and are located far interior in the forests.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF TRIBALS

The tribals have comparatively smaller tribal families, consisting of parents and children. The average household size is 4 (Forest Survey 1992). Almost 58 per cent of males and 52 per cent of females are not married. Remarriage is more common among them, which constitute about 3 per cent.

The literacy rate of tribals is 57.22 per cent as per 1991 census. The highest rate is in Kottayam

(88.69%) and the lowest rate is in Kasaragod district. The Malayarayans and Kanikkars are highly literate and comparatively educated tribal communities. 37 per cent of tribal children are in the school going ages. 22 per cent of tribal children below age 15 attend school.

The employment status of tribals show that they are predominantly agricultural labourers. The total workers from about 49 per cent (Forest Department Survey, 1992), of whom 19 per cent are engaged in minor forest produce collection. Agriculture labour constitute only 11 per cent. Forest labourers constitute 5 per cent. Those in government sector constitute 2 per cent and other workers are 7 per cent. The data substantiate the employment status of the tribals in the State.

About 70 per cent of household possess land for cultivation (Socio-Eco Survey 1976-78). 50 per cent of the families have less than one acre of land in possession. Mostly, the tribals cultivate perennial crops like pepper, cardamom, arecanut as well as seasonal crops like paddy, cholan and Ragi etc. Hardly, the tribals practice any modern method of cultivation.

The per capita income of the tribal population is estimated to be Rs. 1454.18 (1992 Survey). The mean annual income is reported as Rs. 4940.20 of which wages constitute Rs. 1873.69 (37%), income from agriculture is Rs. 744.12 (18%), and those from sale of commodities constitute 5% of the total income.

Housing condition of the tribals is basically poor. Only 31 per cent of houses are reported to the 'good houses'. 9 per cent of houses are electrified. The houseless families are estimated to be 20,000.

For drinking water about 77 per cent of tribal households depend on tank or pond water sources. 37 per cent of tribals draw water from a distance of half a kilometre. Water born diseases are common among the tribals, especially during monsoon season.

Tribals, however, are very responsive to modern allopathic medicine and treatment, and the tribals take the help of Primary Health Centres and Government Hospitals for treatment of diseases, especially those who are staying nearby the fringes of the forests.

The tribals are wanting to have the modern

benefits of development programmes. In fact the programme extended to them are not really, percolating to the entire communities. As far as the primitive tribes are concerned, they are still not settled in forest lands, but are wanderers and are engaged in minor forest collections. Although there are established cultivation among the tribals, majority of them are agricultural labourers. Unemployment problem is acute among the tribals.

These factors are important, when the programmes of forest development is taken up. Without the problems of tribal development the resources management of the forest is a far cry, because both the problems are interlinked.

FOREST RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Government of India adopted a plan of action for implementation of resolution on Joint Forest Management (JFM) with the help of people and the forest department. The purpose was to protect and regenerate the forest resources. The programme assign the community in village a forest guard and a regular watchman against thefts, and illicit felling and encroachment. For scientific management of forest development, the National Commission on Agriculture and the Central Board of Forestry have recommended the abolition of contraction and favouring departmental working. In some States, the entire work of forests is done by forest labourers' co-operatives. In Kerala, although co-operatives are formed in management is not exclusively at the interest of the tribals. In some places the industries have taken over degraded forest lands for industrial purposes. The industrial establishments look for raw materials from forests. In Kerala bamboo cultivation is done by big industries for the purpose of raw materials. This has no direct help to the tribals because the raw materials are not available for the local purpose for their household works easily.

In these contexts, involvement of community is easier for forest resources management, and avoiding them will be in conflict with the forest development.

Deforestation is another problem to be tackled by the Government with the help of local people. The contribution of forestry of GNP is

as low as one per cent today. The deforestation is taking place at the rate of 1.5 million every year, which need to be checked as a concerted effort by the Government and the community at large.

The National Forest policy (1988) has emphasized the importance of environmental stability and conservation of forests, as well as maintaining the intrinsic relationship between forest, tribals and other services. Infact, the tribal development programme hardly impinges upon the pronounced policy of the forest development. The basic problems is that the tribals cannot be developed within the forests, while conserving the forest resources, unless they have an access to it. The forest resources are not available for forest dwellers alone. As noted earlier, the Wild Life Act and conservation of forests for the animals are detrimental to the cultivation carried out by the tribals in some areas. The sanctuaries developed by the forest Department has affected the existence of forest dwellers in some areas, where tribals are inhabited for years.

The total area covered for sanctuaries in the State is more than 3465 sq km excluding the area covered for lakes and others. There are more than the 12 wild life sanctuaries, in the state which are widely dispersed in different districts. The problems of development of these wild life sanctuaries can be carried out by considering the problems of tribals residing there also. Infact the tribals have reported crop loss in many areas due to wild life destructions.

Another problems of forest resources management is that created by the encroachers and poachers of forest lands. Tackling this problem is a stupendous task as it operated as 'vicious circles' where involvement of all the three such as officials of forest department, encroachers and the tribals are necessary. Encroachment of forest land and its appropriations have to a large extent caused destruction of forests and displacement of tribals. Some times these have been under political clout in favour of forest encroachers.

Therefore, steps are required on the part of authorities itself to stop deforestation. The tribals turn out helpless in these contexts. Most of them, although 'possess' land of their 'abodes' for generations, they do not hold titles. Therefore, en-

croachment is easy in their possessed lands. However, these problems are interlinked with the problems of forest development as well.

The programmes of agricultural development, industrialization, social forestry and infrastructure development can be of benefits to the tribals as well, which are based on forest resources. The barren and degraded land in the forest may be utilized for the purpose. Also, the forest fringes can be developed for the purpose of rehabilitating the tribals. Household industries based on forest resources may be developed for employing them. By this, the forest dwellers can be slowly brought into the mainstream of the society. They can be entrusted with the protection of forests, also wherever they are located. Their contact with the public can break the nexus between the forest officials and encroachers. In building the trust among tribals for the protection of forest resources and ecosystem, new development avenues are to be opened up. The local Panchayat Samiti are to be involved in the forest development programme and the development of tribals. The interdepartmental co-ordination for tribal development is to be an integral part of the resources management programme for forests. An integrated approach is all the more important for the resources management of forests and tribal development in the state.

CONCLUSIONS

The resources management of forests and the problems of Tribal development are interlinked. The analysis of the Tribal problems with the available data shows that the tribals are in transition today. They are faced with the problems of displacement from their forest abodes due to the forest development programmes, being implemented, such as sanctuaries and biological parks and lakes etc. The policies of Tribal development implemented have not made much impact on tribal life for improvement. Problems of drinking water, housing, employment and rehabilitation of the displaced tribals are yet to be tackled to a large extent.

The forest resources can be meaningfully managed with the involvement of tribals also in the development programmes. For this, household industries based on forest resources may be

set up for rehabilitating tribals. Production cum-training centres may be planned for the purpose. Although various departments are involved in tribal development programme, there is lack of co-ordination among them in implementing the programme. There is need for involvement of local panchayats to a large extent to integrate various programmes being carried out in the tribal settlements. Tribal development programme is to be made an integral part of the forest resources management as well.

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