Chapter 8

Summary and Conclusion
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In olden days, the tribals lived in harmony with forest and utilized what they needed. In fact, the forest met all their basic needs. But now, there has been significant change in man-forest-interaction in tribal areas. This is brought about by a variety of factors such as inaccessibility to forest resources, land alienation and annihilation of resource base of the tribals. Because of high rate of deforestation certain hamlets do not obtain fire wood and thatching materials sufficiently. However, not much attention has been paid to record these changes and the possible impact on the socio-economic conditions of the tribal people, who are the under privileged in the society.

In order to understand the full implications of the problem, micro-level study was considered most appropriate. Keeping this in view a detailed study was conducted in the tribal areas of Attappady. Attappady was selected because it differed from the rest of Kerala. The area is extremely backward with high incidence of poverty and low level of human development. This is particularly true among the tribal population. A study conducted by the Planning Board in 1975 classified the area as the most backward block in the whole of the State. The situation does not seem to have changed much.

It is the only Tribal Development Block in Kerala. In a sense Attappady could be considered as the microcosm of backward India. It exhibits the typical characteristics of the poverty-stricken area with environmental degradation, socio-economic exploitation, policy induced process of poverty, backward in agriculture, lack of employment in secondary and tertiary sectors and absence of organization of the poor etc. A study of such an area has been considered as worth noticing.

The study was based mainly on primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from 300 households located in the Attappady from the three panchayaths of Agali, Pudhur and Sholayoor. The samples were selected on the basis of simple Random sampling method. The secondary data were collected from published reports and historical records. The summary of the major findings and conclusions of the present study are given in the following pages.
8.1. Summary

Forest has been the life line for the survival and sustenance of the tribal population from time immemorial. Writings of the past indicate that forest in the pre-British days was luxuriant. Agriculture too flourished without seriously hampering forest. Inspite of the several favourable measures taken by the Government through various development activities, the economic conditions of the tribals in the mountain lands is still deplorable. Many factors were identified for this deplorable situation. One of them is the massive in-migration of people from thickly populated plain land to this thinly populated mountain slope. The immediate consequence of such migration was large scale deforestation. It was followed by the introduction of different land use activities, quite different from the traditional ways of land use in this region. In the course of events, the tribals lost their land, demographic structure of Attappady changed, cropping pattern got diversified, traditional techniques of production were ruined, new crops and new techniques of cultivation, and the entire cost and return structure of production under went radical change.

Till the second quarter of the century, the area was inhabited only by tribals. However, since then it witnessed massive influx of people from the plain land and the entire demographic profile of the region changed. Uncontrolled deforestations, over-grazing of cattle and introduction of agricultural practices inappropriate to the ecological and agro-climatic conditions of the region, have changed the entire demographic structure of Attappady. The area is now characterized by wide crop diversity handed down by the history of succession among both settlers and the indigenous people.

Tribal women are the worst affected in the process of change. Displacement for development project has deprived tribes folk of their land and forests from where much of their food came. Today they have to walk much longer distances than in the past to collect food and fodder.

Development schemes have effected a through change in the socioeconomic and cultural life of the tribal women. Private property in land and recognition of husband as the head of the family has created a negative impact on
the status of women. Improved facilities of development like transportation, health, housing and technology have not reached women. Women continued to work harder and have no time to enjoy the fruits of development.

8.2. Conclusion

The tribal society was once self-reliant. They had community based, eco-friendly and self governing political life till the time out side intervention of the settlers and Government began.

Tribal women in traditional tribal society enjoyed great freedom and gender equality. The three tribal communities Irulas, Mudugas and Kurumbas were the three original tribal communities in Attappady. The three communities had their own religious, cultural, political, social and economic life. Their culture was the motivating and controlling factor in their life. Importance of religion has seen a decline with rites and rituals being performed, mechanically, without traditional fervour and gaiety. Distinct important traits have disintegrated with the development of apathy for traditional songs, dance and ornaments.

The health condition of tribal women depicts a very dangerous picture, the primary health centers do not have sufficient medicines. The conditions of the sub-centers are also very pathetic. Whether deliveries take place at the home or in hospital, the tribal mothers are not healthy enough to deliver healthy babies. Almost all of them are horribly anemic. Most of them suffer from deficiency too. It is dangerous for a pregnant woman to have a hemoglobin count below ten. But most tribal women have only six or seven counts. Eclampsia (high blood pressure and seizures) is very common among the tribal women as compared to other women.

Educational facility in Attappady is very poor. Drop out rate in schools is higher than that in other parts of the state. The school atmosphere is completely different from what they are used to be at home. Students are not regular. If there is a festival, they disappear for weeks. Distance from home to the school is another serious problem faced by the students. The facilities in tribal hostels are not very satisfactory. The hostel is run as part of the ITDP, 35 children share one room and
there are only four bath rooms in the entire hostel. So horrible is the condition of
the hostels for school children and so outbreaks of cholera, dysentery and other
diseases are common.

The major determinants of livelihood of the tribals in Attappady are
possession/or access to natural, physical, household, and human capital. A perusal
of the ownership/possession of these assets indicates that development programmes
have not succeeded in building up the minimum basic requirements of the tribes.
More than 50 per cent of the tribal women still remain illiterate and there are wide
inter-community differences in educational achievements. Lack of electricity is a
major problem faced by the Kurumabas. More than 90 per cent of the Kurumaba
house holds are still not electrified.

Per capita land availability has come down considerably and around 95 per
cent of the households have neither private nor forest land. Kurumba community
still depends much on forest for their livelihood. Irulas are relatively well- off
compared to the other two communities.

External intervention in Attappady is essentially a continuation of the out
migration process to Malabar which had its origin in Central Travancore. Some
people from Tamil Nadu also migrated to this region even earlier. The early settlers
were rich land owners from the plains who had direct influence over Jenmis. The
main motivating factor for the inflow of these people to the region at the first stage
was acquisition of land for extraction of forest timber. Cultivation became the
major motive only during the next stage.

As a result of the influx of people from outside the area, agricultural
practices of the valley have under gone total change from the unique tribal mode of
production to a variety of modern types. The Malayali and the Tamil settlers
brought in to the area a variety of crops which aimed at catering to the market for
money. The tribals have been forced to accept many of these crops to supplement
their livelihood. Kurumbas, however, continue to cultivate major part of their land
with traditional tribal crops (under shifting cultivation). Inadequate irrigation
facilities, poor climate, poor quality of land are identified as the major reasons for
decline in dependency on land as the major source of livelihood.
Wages received by the tribal women are very low. And the number of days they are engaged in hired labour in a week at the most is maximum of two days. The main sources of wage labour for tribes folk are work in the land of non-tribes during the agricultural season, work in soil conservation programme, construction work offered by contractors etc. The participation level of tribe’s folk in government service is a mere percent only. Number of days they are engaged in wage labour are also very low. Majority (75%) get 6-10 days in a month as wage employment.

Compared to other sources of livelihood wage contributes a major part of tribal’s household income. Income from other sources, namely, livestock, forest products, and agriculture is relatively low among all the tribal communities. The drastic decline in the share of agriculture in the income portfolio of tribesfolk is attributed to land alienation, lack of fertile land, and lack of sufficient institutional support. Agriculture, for most households, is an activity taken up during periods when opportunities in wage labour become scarce, and only as a secondary source of income. Forest dependency is higher among Kurumbas than among Irulas and Mudugas.

The expenditure pattern of the three tribal communities shows a common nature. They utilize about 61 per cent of their income for food. They spend very little for education, medicine, repair of their houses, and fuel and lighting. Other important expenses they incur are on religious and cultural activities. Their earnings are less than their expenditure and consequently they are forced to borrow and that result in alienation of their land and bondedness.

Deforestation affects very badly the life of the tribal women. Disappearance of many varieties of species from the forest through deforestation led to deterioration of tribal life. Health condition of the tribals depends to a very great extent on forest resources. Shortage of water adversely affected the cultivation of the tribals. Availability of fuel became scarce due to deforestation. Only a proper development strategy can improve the condition of tribal women.

Many factors were responsible for the present situation of the tribals. Lack of employment opportunities, poor land productivity, exploitation by the powerful

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sections of the society, poor health and related diseases, low level of education and skills, denial of their access to forest, no way to borrow money when they are in need of money are major among them.

Non availability of water is one of the major problems faced by the tribal women. Most of them depend on ponds for water. But now they have to cover a long distance to draw water. In some of the hamlets they have to depend solely on rain water. Availability of rain is also in very small degrees.

Collection of Non Timber Produce is one of the important sources of the livelihood of the tribals. In the traditional tribal economy they used to gather enormous varieties of edible tuber crops, fruits, cereals, mushroom, leafy vegetables, honey, oilseeds, fuel wood etc. Due to deforestation and the related changes the present economic structure of the tribal economy has changed and that adversely affected the sources of their livelihood.

None of the projects implemented here so far has considered the peculiarities of tribal culture and belief. There are sharp disparities in the health care services available to remote tribal regions and mainstream Kerala. The state health department takes an indifferent towards the health issue of tribal communities. There has been no comprehensive survey of health and socio economic status of the tribals since 1992. Instead of seeking permanent solutions to the problems faced by tribals, authorities indulge in stop these arrangements. For example, when starvation and anemia became acute free rice and iron tablets were distributed. When lots of money is spent in the name of tribal development it should not be difficult to ensure basic health care services to the tribal communities.

In the shift from traditional tribal society to the modern welfare oriented society, development processes have neglected both tribal women and forest environment. Services in the field of health, education, and environmental spheres are too inadequate to bring about any significant improvement in the social and economic life of tribal women.
A comparative analysis of the three tribal communities using the crucial indices of land ownership, income, employment, education and housing reveals that the present socio-economic conditions are very depressing. The indices of development such as the size of the land holdings, income, employment, education, health, housing and their dependence on forest substantiate the above conclusion.

In spite of the various development programmes and schemes implemented by the Government, for their upliftment, the economic standards and living conditions of the tribals are still backward. This can be attributed to two factors. One, the development schemes are not implemented in quite earnestness and they monitored throughout due to inadequate communication facilities and two, inaccessibility of the tribal settlements. The traditional outlook and negative attitude of the tribals to development and absence of employment avenues in the secondary and tertiary sectors are the major stumbling blocks which keep them in a backward state.

8.3. Suggestions

The tribals consist of a well-knit cohesive group. They depend on forests and live in mutual co-operation and support. This practice links them with the economic system and environment in which they live. Any change in the system will have a pervasive effect on other systems.

Land is the basic resource of the tribals without which their economic condition cannot be improved. Cultivation of traditional food crops such as raagi, chama, maize, millet, pulses and grams is to be encouraged. This will help them to improve their living condition. The agricultural life of the tribals should be revitalized. The landless have to be given back their land under the aegis of the government intervention.

Conditions of the educational institutions are to be improved and education promoted. Teachers should give much attention to the tribal students from their primary levels onwards. Conditions of the tribal hostel are to be improved. The congested facilities should be elaborated. The number of tribal hostel shall be improved.
A more balanced health system should be introduced. Conditions of the most of the hospitals are very pathetic at present. Even though they receive some concessions in health care they are not aware of such facilities. The number of hospitals is also insufficient to satisfy their health care needs. Governmental projects oriented for boosting health shall be improved.

The traditional system of administration that had been dominant among the tribes should be respected and updated instead of imposing alien forms of administration. Autonomous forms of administration permitted under the fifth and sixth schedules of the constitution are to be provided.

A balanced approach to development ensuring political, economic, social, and cultural rights of the tribes and also ensuring equity and social justice, and fair resource allocation, with particular attention to gender equality has to be evolved.

In planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects affecting tribes living conditions and future, tribal's participation is to be ensured. Programmes have to be worked out to promote public awareness regarding tribal situation and eliminate all kinds of threats to the existence of the tribes. In order to give equal opportunities to tribal women, long term strategies that can challenge the existing structure are required.

For the development of tribes a new vision is essential. A vision to build an ecologically sound, non-exploitative, just, non-patriarchal self-sustained society. The most important aspect is participation in the decision making process. Without this there is no meaning of talking about tribal development.

Development has to be based on the traditional beliefs and values of the tribals. The basis of alternative development should be protection of life. At the same time it must respect the social, economic, political and cultural life of the tribals.