CHAPTER VII

STUDIES ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND HEALTH STATUS OF RESIDENTS IN POOVAR

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Poovar- Vizhijam area is occupied by ten villages. The villages in Poovar – Vizhijam area include Poovar, Karumkulam, Kochuthura, Puthiyathura, Pallam, Pulluvila, Adimalathura, Chowara, Vizhijam North and Vizhinjam. South (Statistical Cell Report, 2007). And the nearest village to Poovar estuary is ‘Poovar’.

Poovar is a small coastal village in the Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala state, South India. This village is almost at the southern tip of Thiruvananthapuram and there is not much distance from here to the Kerala-Tamilnadu border. This village has a beautiful beach which attracts tourists. There are also some good tourist resorts.

Poovar lies very close to Vizhinjam, a natural harbor. Poovar estuary is a bar built estuary connects with the sea during high tides. It’s natural beauty enables it to be a quiet tourist spot. Poovar was a trading center of timber, sandlewood, ivory and spices. It is believed that the trading ships of King Solomon landed in a port called ‘Ophir’, which is figured out as Poovar. Poovar has been one of the ancient Muslim settlements along the western coast of India. The Central Mosque here is believed to be built by Malik ibn Dinar and his missionary team, more than 1400 years ago.


7.1.2 POOVAR AND ITS PEOPLE

Poovar is a historically important, ecologically diverse, and socially and religiously rich village. In history, there are references of a fish-landing centre at the southern tip of Thiruvananthapuram then called Offier. Poovar Panchayat, in the Neyyattinkara Taluk, lies at the very southern tip of the Kerala State at about 28 km
south of Thiruvananthapuram city (Figure. 107). The revenue village “Poovar” has a land area, roughly covering about 4000 acres.

Poovar panchayat in Parassala Block of Thiruvananthapuram District has a total area of 7.34 sq. kms. It is surrounded by Karumkulam Panchayat on the north, Kulathoor Panchayat on the South, Arabian Sea on the west, and Thirupuram panchayat on the east. It has two coastal wards predominantly inhabited by the fishermen community. Fisherfolk live in a very narrow strip of land along the coastline for about one km in length. Fisherfolk houses in the village keep a safe distance of almost 50 meters from the sea with some exceptions. Recent natural calamities such as tsunami/sea erosion had not caused much damage in the village.

Poovar panchayat had a population of 25.6 thousand of which nearly two-fifths were Hindus, about one-third were Christians. And a little more than one-fourth were Muslims. Almost 60 percent of the Christians are fisherfolk.

The socio-economic overheads of the village are relatively well-developed. In this village, there are seven schools and six libraries in this area; two of them managed by the fisherfolk themselves. There is a KSRTC (Kerala State Road Transport Corporation) subdepot, and the Bus Stand is hardly one km away from the estuary. A Community Health Centre and a Homeo hospital are located 200 metres away from the residential area of the fisherfolk. There are different Government offices and numerous religious institutions in this area.

Fishing and marketing are the major sources of income for the Christian population; trade and commerce form the major occupations of the Muslims, and the Hindus are mainly farmers. During some seasons, when the sea becomes very rough, the fish workers are forced to remain idle (for about four to six months a year), they live under conditions of severe poverty.

Literacy and educational standards in the village have improved significantly in recent years. The health and hygiene profile of the locality has also improved vastly with improvement in the quality and variety of food intake and hygiene practices.
7.1.3 Cultural Profile

The Poovar Panchayath in Poovar are Christians, with a notable exception. They are in the mariculture sector, which is highly unhygienic, unscientific, and risky. Religion and culture have largely influenced their lifestyle in terms of their attitudes, behavior, thoughts, and decisions. As a result, a lot of changes in the lifestyles of the fisherfolk in Poovar is a community in transition, as was evident from the data collected by the researchers. The high percentage of females in the Poovar Panchayath indicates that the community has undergone some changes in the past. The sex ratio (920 females per 1000 males) shows that there is a significant limitation by 33 females. The low percentage of the population of about one-third indicates that the community has undergone some changes in the past. The low percentage of the population of about 12 percent, it is a community with a small population and one-third of the total population is females. The low percentage of females indicates that the community has undergone some changes in the past.

Figure 107. Panchayaths in Thiruvananthapuram District.
(Source: KSREC Annual Report, 2001)
7.1. 3 Cultural Profile

Fisherfolk in Poovar are Christians without exception. They go to the churches on Sundays and other special days. This religious attitude may be because of the nature of their occupation, which is highly uncertain, challenging, and risky. Religion still largely influences the fisherfolk in terms of their attitudes, behavior, thoughts, and aspirations. Education and media have made a lot of changes in the lifestyles of the modern generation. On the whole, the fisherfolk in Poovar is a community in transition.

7.1. 4 Demographic Profile

The fisherfolk live close to the sea on common lands and were not mad after private property in land and other assets, unlike the mainstream population. The high density of population is a serious matter of concern for the quality of life of the people and the housing problem is very acute. This has been pointed out as an indication of low social development and low status of women in fisherfolk. The sex ratio (920 women per 1000 men) among the fisherfolk in Poovar is unfavourable.

Totally 899 houses are present in Poovar area. The average household size for all communities in Poovar taken together is 4.1 members. Among the fisherfolk it is only slightly higher, 4.2. This shows that the message of family strength limitation by Government of India, has been accepted by the fisherfolk as well.

The proportion of the child population (0 to 15 age group) is about one third and of the elderly population (above 60 age group) is less than five percent. Housewives account for about 17 percent. Thus, about 46 percent of the population comes under the labour force. Subtracting the unemployed of about 12 percent, it was observed that the working force in the area to be about one-third of the total population.

The fertility rates have declined heavily in recent years. The low proportion of the elderly population is an indication of lower life expectancy and poor health and hygiene status. Hard labour, unhygienic living conditions, and unscientific health and hygiene practices lead to high morbidity and mortality rates among the fisherfolk (George and Domi, 2002)).
7.1.5 Water Issues in the Poovar-Vizhijam Area

Naturally the groundwater close to the shore front is salty. The open wells in this area are also contaminated due to lack of proper maintenance. The drinking water for the thickly populated coastal neighbourhoods of the area is brought from open wells or tube wells erected about five km away from the coastal area and is supplied through tanker lorries by state authorities.

7.2. HOUSEHOLD SURVEY DETAILS

Detailed Survey was conducted in the Poovar village among the 420 residents in randomly selected houses (One hundred houses) in the shorelines of the Poovar estuary ie. during November 2005 to assess the socio-economic and health status. Self prepared questionnaires (Appendix-II) were used for the collection of the data. The questionnaire used in the survey sought information on the family size, age, income, incidence of different diseases among the study population, their drinking water sources, their waste disposal methods, septic tank facility, solid waste disposal methods and their opinion about the pollution status of water sources in their surrounding areas.

The residents selected for the study were divided into four age groups. They include 49 children in age group 0-5 years, 76 individuals in the age group 6-18 years, 212 individuals in the age group 19-55 years and 83 individuals in the age group above 55 years.

The information obtained through oral survey conducted among the residents, and the results of the data analysed were described below.
7.2.1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

The main occupation of the residents in Poovar village is fishing. Totally 37% men were doing fishing. The other people are government servants (16%), self-employed (15%), private employed (4%), business (3%), money lending (1%), domestic Service (2%). Totally unemployed include 4% of the residents, Gulf emigration is 12% and 6% are retired persons. 116 Students are present in this area. 32 families (32%) are in the low income group, 56 families (56%) are in the middle income group and 12 families (12%) are in the high income group.

7.2.2 NATURE OF HOUSES

Among the hundred houses selected for the survey, 12 are hut, 22 thatched, 14 are tiled and 52 are concrete. Electricity facility is present in 98% houses and absent in 2% houses. 83% houses are with Latrine facility and 17% houses are without Latrine facility. The people residing in 6% houses depends on common well. 32% houses are with own tap and 15% houses with own well. The remaining people living in 47% houses uses common tapwater supplied by Government Water Authority.

7.2.3 HEALTH STATUS OF THE RESIDENTS NEAR POOVAR ESTUARY

The results of the survey conducted to assess the health status of the residents in Poovar village and the data on disease prevalence among different age groups in Poovar village are given in Fig. 108 and 109.

The prevalence of water borne diseases are high among the people in the age group 6-18 years, and other diseases are prevalent among the individuals in the age group 19-55 years. The children in the age group 0-5 years in the Poovar area are reported as suffering from one or multiple ailments listed in the questionnaire as health concerns.
7.2.4 POLLUTION STATUS OF WATER SOURCES

The opinion about the pollution load of the river and quality of drinking water sources in the Poozer village were assessed through the survey and shown in Figure 110. All the well water in this area are polluted and are not good for drinking purposes. The field studies done by Ranjita Hari (2001) on the drinking water quality of the village. Poozer also showed the well water is unfit for drinking. The ground water in Poozer area is also subjected to pollution through different activities involving sewage disposal. The skin disease prevalence among the population age group 10-55 years. The bathing in the open wet is hazardous, as microorganisms that may cause skin diseases in the residents there. The method used for solid waste disposal by the residents are shown in Figure 111. Only ten percent of the solid waste generated by residents were burnt and the remaining quantity (90%) were dumped in their surrounding.

7.2.6 SEPTIC TANK FACILITIES

The survey report also reveals that the majority of the residents are having the septic tank facility in their houses. The other seventy percent of the residents do not have septic tank facility in their latrines (Figure 112). Also only 20% of the septic tanks are constructed at a distance of 5 to 6 meters from the houses, while 50% are at 1 meter distance and 30% are at 2 meters distance from the house. According to the Kerala State Water Supply and Drainage Board (2002), the distance between the septic tanks and latrines is very much important. The report also shows the prevalence of the diseases in the Poozer estate.

Figure 108. Water Borne Diseases

- [Graph showing disease prevalence by age group]

- [Legend: Jaundice, Diarrohea, Skin disease]

Figure 109. Other Diseases

- [Graph showing disease prevalence by age group]

- [Legend: Malaria, Elephantiasis, Hepatitis, Diphtheria, Chicken box, Measles, Chickengunia]
7.2.4 POLLUTION STATUS OF WATER SOURCES

The opinion about the pollution load of Poovar estuary and quality of drinking water sources in the Poovar village were assessed through the survey and shown in Figure. 110. All the well water in this area are polluted and are not good for drinking purposes. Previous studies done by Renjini Hari (2001) on the drinking water quality of the Poovar Panchayat also showed the well water is unfit for drinking. The ground water and surface water in Poovar area is also subjected to pollution through different anthropogenic activities including sewage disposal. The skin disease prevalence is about 4% among the people of age group 18-55 years. The bathing in the estuary water containing microbial contaminants may cause skin diseases in the residents of these areas.

7.2.5 SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL METHOD

The method used for solid waste disposal by the residents are shown in Figure. 111. Only ten percent of the wastes generated by residents were burnt and the remaining quantity (90%) were dumped in their surroundings.

7.2.6 SEPTIC TANK FACILITIES

The survey reports showed that only thirty percent of the residents are having the septic tank facility in their houses. The other seventy percent of the residents do not have septic tank facility in their latrines (Figure. 112). Also only 20% of the septic tanks are constructed at a distance above 6 meters from the houses, while 50% are at 3 meter distance and 30% are at 2 meter distance from the houses as shown in Figure. 113. According to the Kerala State Water Supply and Sanitation Agency rules (James et al., 2006), the distance between wells and septic tanks should be minimum 15 metres. The pollution of ground water may be due to leaching of sewage from latrines or from the tourist resorts near the Poovar estuary.
Opinion About Pollution of Water Sources

- 100% Polluted

Waste disposal method

- 10% Open dumping
- 90% Burning

Septic tank facility in the house

- 70% Present
- 30% Absent

Distance of septic tank from the house

- 50% 2m
- 20% 3m
- 30% >6m