

**CHAPTER -- VIII**

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

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In olden days, the tribals lived in harmony with nature and utilised what they needed. In fact, the forests met all their basic needs. But now, there has been significant change in man-forest-interactions in tribal areas. This is brought about by a variety of factors such as inaccessibility of forest resources, land alienation and annihilation of resource base of the tribals. Because of high rate of deforestation certain hamlets do not obtain even firewood 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 Idukki District. Idukki was selected mainly for two reasons. Firstly there has been a high rate of deforestation. Deforestation has adversely affected the socio-economic conditions of the forest dependent tribal in the district. Secondly, this district has the second highest concentration of tribals population in the state.

The study was based mainly on primary data and was supplemented with secondary data. Primary data was gathered from 130 tribal households located in the Devicolam taluk of Idukki district. A multi stage stratified random sampling method was used for the selection of the samples. Participant observation and questionnaire methods were used for the collection of primary data. The secondary data was 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. A few policy suggestions that emerge from the study which can help to solve problems faced by the tribals are also made in this chapter.

### **Summary**

Forests have been the lifeline for the survival and sustenance of the tribal population from time immemorial. Writings of the past indicate that the forests in the pre-British days were luxuriant and agriculture too flourished without seriously hampering each other. Organized exploitation of forests took place in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Poonjar Rajah (Pandyan king) and it gained alarming proportions during the British rule in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The British commercially exploited the forests for timber on a large scale for the monetary benefits. Depletion of natural forests in the study area became more pronounced during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The local communities, mainly the tribal who lived inside or in the periphery of the forests depending on it for their existence were always the most immediate and adversely affected by such ruthless exploitation.

Tribals in the past practised shifting cultivation and subsisted by the collection of forest produce. Various Forest Acts, along with the prohibition of shifting cultivation in 1867 brought about drastic changes in the life of the tribals. After Independence too, the Indian Govt. followed the British policy in the forestry sector. Immigration into Idukki led to further changes in the forests and impoverisation of the tribals. One of the major outcomes of such large-scale immigration was the progressive alienation of tribals from the forest land.

Narrowing down to the three selected communities, the Hill Pulayas Mannans and Muthuvans prior to these changes had equal access to the forestland and were totally dependent on its bounties for their sustenance.

In the wake of capitalist development in the agricultural sector the Hill Pulayas were offered attractive wages as labourers. Thus given the options of low value agriculture, tenurial insecurity and wage employment, they opted for the last. The Muthuvans, however, continued to live in the forest amidst all the restrictions enforced on them on the use of forests and they had to depend on their patrons and immigrants in order to make both ends meet. Resultant of all these factors is the present socio-economic conditions of these tribal communities.

Even though all the three communities were totally dependent on the forest for their subsistence in the past, the Mannans gradually came into possession of land and started practising subsistence agriculture. Mannans gradually gave up their subsistence agriculture and at present they are engaged in the cultivation of coconut and pepper. This shift has had a positive effect on their economic life. Having come into contact with the outsiders they are now in the mainstream of life and their living standards too have improved considerably. With awareness of present day farming techniques, market situations, government assistance, they are in a better position to harvest sufficient returns from their land.

The Hill Pulayas, however, when compared to the Mannans are still categorized as landless and are by and large the labour class. Though landless, they are cultivating paddy, sugar cane and vegetables on the land to which they have access, but no title deeds.

The Muthuvans, once food gatherers and hunters, today are bound by restrictions on the utilization of forests. The vast tracts of forest land, once their abode, has diminished. Though dependence on forests for subsistence still continues, the Forest Department offers them alternate employment opportunities in the plantations.

The self-sufficient non-monetised tribal economy of the past which relied heavily on the forests for needs was transformed into a money-based economy which brought with it its vagaries. Thus the tribals are at present, reduced to the status of mere labourers living on daily wages and thereby market dependent. Unlike in the past, where the concept was day to day existence with no thought of tomorrow, today they are conscious of their living conditions, status and future.

Importance of religion has seen a decline, with rites and rituals being performed mechanically, without the traditional fervour and gaiety. Distinct important traits have disintegrated with the development of an apathy for traditional songs, dances and ornaments.

### **Conclusion**

The main economic livelihood of the tribals is their manual labour and there is not much diversity in their employment pattern and source of income. Their earning capacity being low, their income and standard of living too are correspondingly at a low level.

Among the land possessing tribals, the average size of land holding is less than two acres. Majority of the land is cultivated and the important crops are paddy and a few horticultural crops, besides cash crops like coffee pepper, lemongrass and coconut. The main reasons for low productivity are the lack of financial assistance and inadequacy of irrigation facilities. Alienation of land is a serious problem among the tribal households. Transfer of land was necessitated mainly because of their failure to raise adequate resources to meet their various consumption needs.

As the tribals are economically backward they depend mainly on wage income and it is supplemented by their income from land. Less than 50 percent of

the tribal children are school going, the rest are retained at home mainly due to the lack of desire for education.

A comparative analysis of the three communities using the crucial indices of land ownership, income, employment, education and housing reveals that the present socio-economic conditions are very depressing, though the landed community is better off. The indices of development such as the size of land holdings, income, employment, education, health, housing and their dependence on forest substantiate the above conclusions.

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 earnest and monitored throughout, due to inadequate communication facilities and two, the 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.

### **Policy Suggestions**

The following suggestions which have policy implications emerge from the present investigation.

- (1) The Tribals consist of well-knit cohesive groups, depending on forests and living with mutual co-operation and support. This practice, as a social system links them with the economic system and environment in which they live. Any change in one of the systems has a pervasive effect on other systems. This inter linkage should be taken into account, while implementing any development programmes in the study area.

- (2) Land is the basic resource of the tribals without which their economic condition cannot be improved. The study reveals that the socio economic conditions of the tribals depend on their basic resource land. So, the alienated and dispossessed land should be given back to the tribals.
- (3) The Implementation of Kerala Scheduled Tribe (Restriction on Transfer of Land and Restoration of Alienated Land) Act 1975 is a ticklish issue, considering the mounting resistance from the settlers. However, this Act should be implemented to uplift the tribals for which new ways and means may be thought of.
- (4) The development programmes implemented through ITDP (Integrated Tribal Development Projects) are mostly beneficiary oriented programmes aiming to get benefits to the tribals directly. In a backward area like Devicolam, they should be supplemented by Area Development Programmes so as to improve the socio-economic conditions of the tribals.
- (5) Preference should be given to the tribal labourers in the Forest Department Plantations and the Commercial Plantations adjoining tribal habitations, as the employment of tribal labour is negligible there.
- (6) Agricultural development on modern lines must be introduced in the backward tribal agrarian regions. Stations imparting technical know-how, training in modern farming techniques and providing seeds and seedlings to the farmers must be established in important tribal centres.

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