

CHAPTER - II
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Although the study is focused on Idukki district, the tribal situations in many other parts of the country have similarities in greater or lesser extent. Therefore, a review of the important studies on the socio-economic conditions of the tribals in India is relevant for understanding the specifications of the situation in Idukki.

The earlier works on this topic were done by the British administrators who provided information in the form of gazetteers, monographs and handbooks. Many Anthropologists like L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer, L.A. Krishna Iyer, A. Aiyappan and K.S. Singh provided further stimulus to the study. The Dhebar Commission (1961), the Committee on Tribal economy in Forest Areas (Harisingh committee 1967), the National Commission on Agriculture (1976), the National Committee on the Development of Backward areas (1981) and the Reports of the Commissions for SC/ST from time to time stressed the need for considering the tribal economy with any of the programmes of forest as the tribes had a symbiotic relationship with forests.

A study entitled 'The Forest and the Tribe – Their Inter Relationships' by Gosh (1982)¹, reveals the balance mechanisms established between forest and tribes. Gosh's study among the Lepchas of Darjeeling district, West Bengal observed that the use of plant resources were absolutely governed by the ethno-ecological understanding of the people. Most of the structural materials were derived from the endemic species. At the same time, it was found that in very limited and rational way, controlled consumption of wood was practised by the tribals. The authors recorded a

total number of 112 species of plants used by the tribals to fulfil all the needs of their community.

Guha (1983)², while analysing the British and post –British forest policies in India, concentrates on the process whereby the traditionally held rights of the forest communities have been progressively curtailed through the development of forest policies, management and legislation. A feature common to the different types of forest exploitation whatever the end use of the product, was the exclusion of those communities into whose territory such policies intruded. The author highlights the fact that while before Independence forests were exploited for strategic raw materials for imperial interests, in the post Independence era, it was the commercial and industrial interests which dominated. In both situations, the forest communities were consistently discriminated against.

Joshi (1983)³ taking a similar historical reasoning, argued that before the advent of the British, tribals who were the virtual owners of the forest lands wherever they inhabited, were reduced to the poorest of poor and were put at the mercy of the lower level functionaries of the Forest Department.

Joshi (1987)⁴ examines the causes and consequences of deforestation in Kerala. The author highlights the sharp reduction in forest areas in terms of low land-man ratio. Increasing population growth and the consequent increase in demand for agricultural land, fuel-wood, fodder and timber led to the encroachments on forest land and illegal forest clearance. The development programmes started by the Central and State governments have also caused deforestation to a great extent. Deforestation is thus an outcome of the interaction between the factors governing agricultural expansion and forest land use on the one hand and the nature and extent of forest resource management and utilisation on the other.

An in-depth study on the forest economy, deforestation, exploitation and status change of the tribal women has been attempted by Fernands and Menon (1987)⁵. Their study points out that forest dwellers are the worst affected victims of deforestation. Women are deeply affected because of the role assigned to them in the sex based division of labour. The destruction of forests has resulted in their indebtedness, and in many cases, land alienation and even bondage.

Ghate. S Rucha (1988)⁶, in her thesis examines the economic impact of forest policy on the tribals. The study points out that the dwindling forest cover has severely affected tribal dependence on forests and adversely their standard of living. Insufficient employment and low opportunities of self employment have forced the tribals to indulge in illegal activities like encroaching forest lands and illicit felling. At the same time the revenue oriented forest policy of the Government, by its single minded pursuit of commercial plantations, has grossly neglected the needs of the tribal population. It seems that many forest officials are not aware of the tribal problems and consider the forest dwellers only as labourers for forestry works. The privileges and concessions enjoyed by the tribals are considered as burden on the forests.

Some studies deal with the conflict over forest land among different communities and its impact on land use. For instance Chundamannil (1988)⁷ examines historically the forest land use policy and the conservation intent in Kerala. It is ascertained that forest management has been through different phases of conservation and development. During the colonial period, plantations of export crops were given priority. Changes in the political, and economic conditions after Independence resulted in programmes for colonisation of forests and forest leases for food production. The nascent industrial sector later became dominant and got the

State Forest Department to convert natural forest to industrial plantations. Politically powerless groups such as tribals got ignored in land use decisions.

Maheswari (1990)⁸, highlights that tribals are the repository of vast knowledge on the uses of biological materials which is often kept secret and is passed on by verbal traditions only. As the tribal scene in the tropics is fast changing due to deforestation, there is an urgent need to prepare ethno-biological inventories and to evolve strategies for conservation of ethno-biologically important species and overall protection of the forests.

Rajaraja Varma (1990)⁹, in his article points out that tribal form an important part of the forest eco-system and therefore, any activity in the name of biosphere reserve should begin with a genuine understanding of the life styles and problems of the concerned tribal population. Kelkar and Nathan (1991)¹⁰ analyses the changing gender roles and the formation of patriarchy in the contest of the continuing loss of control over land and forests on part of the Jharkand Adivasis.

Moench (1991)¹¹ has studied the causes of deforestation in the Cardamom Hills in Idukki district of Kerala. The author emphasises that the relation between the ethnic and religious communities has greatly influenced migration, encroachment and conflict and an overview of such relationships is essential to understand the land use dynamics. *In his historical analysis of the causes of deforestation, the impact on the most immediate and adversely affected tribal community is left out*

Mohandas (1992)¹², examines the impact of new settlers in the Western Ghats region on the socio-economic conditions of the tribal in Wayanad. The study also examines in detail the process of land alienation among them. He states that large scale migration into the ecologically susceptible Western Ghats area not only caused immense forest degradation but also economic and social deprivation of the tribals.

Varghese (1992)¹³, studied different patterns in the forest dependent life styles of Cholanaiyan, the cave men of Kerala. Two settlements were selected for close monitoring, based on their proximity to the external influences. Attention was directed towards the influence of market and the outside society upon the traditional subsistence activities such as gathering, group formation and time budgeting. Participant observation and recall method were employed to gather primary data. The researcher observed the close proximity to the outside society and its influence on the tribal community to spend more time on commercial gathering rather than on food collection. In addition to that the development programmes were also found to encouraged them to gather for money with which they can buy the food items and other commodities. Despite the change from gathering for food to gathering for income, as he concludes the tribal remain with the same forest dependant life style.

Socio Economic Conditions of the tribals

A few sociological and anthropological works relating to the socio-linguistic and ethnographic aspects of the tribal life are available. They provide an insight into the variety of traditions that existed, their attitude towards land and their interaction with other communities. In 'Ethnographic Notes on South India' and 'Tribes and Castes of South India,' Thurston (1906 and 1909)^{14,15} explains in detail the ethnographic survey conducted on the different tribal communities. It is the first work on South Indian Tribes. Details such as original ways of life, customs and rituals, religious beliefs of the tribal communities are explained in these monumental works. There is also an account of the Paniya tribal community of Kerala living a settled life resultant of their interaction with the outside world.

Ananthakrishna Iyer's (1908)¹⁶ work on the various castes and tribes of Travancore and Cochin published in four volumes, titled 'Cochin Tribes and Castes' is the first of its kind and carries descriptions on tribes like Kadars, Malayans, Nayadis, Ulladans, Paniyans and others with emphasis on their socio-economic, cultural and linguistic elements.

Krishna Iyer (1937)¹⁷ also did similar ethnographic work in Travancore and Cochin area. He concentrated his study on the hill tribes, who were fast dying out. His first volume describes the Kanikkars, Malapandarams, Malakurumbas, MalaPulayas, Malayarayans and Marasars. The Travancore tribes are described in the second and third volumes.

'The Nayadies of Malabar' and 'The Irulars of Kerala' are two important works of Aiyappan (1937, 1944)^{18,19}. The former is a socio-economic account and the latter is a social and anthropological study carried out systematically.

Luiz (1962)²⁰ study 'Tribes of Kerala' is an exhaustive account of all the forty eight tribes in Kerala. He has examined the changing pattern of various aspects of social life, like occupation, mode of living, diet, religion, marriage, rituals and superstitions. It is basically a sociological study and much of their economic life has not been discussed.

Mathur (1977)²¹ apart from being a descriptive study on the socio-linguistic evolution of tribals in Kerala, provides valuable statistical information on some of the major problems confronted by the tribals like land alienation, bonded-labour, indebtedness and the status of tribal women.

Chattopadhyaya (1978)²² is an attempt to interpret and depict the varied aspects of Indian Tribal life such as the origin, traditional dress, social customs, symbolism of their rites and ceremonies. He points out the fact that, even though

there are some similarities in beliefs and life styles between tribals non-tribals, they have not blurred the sense of social distinction nor have they eroded their distinct tribal features. The latter is a social and anthropological study carried out systematically.

'Socio-Economic Survey of Tribals in Kerala' 1979²³, conducted by the state Bureau of Economics and statistics during 1976-78, is the most comprehensive survey on the Scheduled Tribes of Kerala. The main points of focus are the demographic features, literary level, traditional occupation and current occupation, income and expenditure, indebtedness, housing, schooling, health and related aspects of the tribals.

Kunhaman (1979)²⁴, made a detailed study on the problems encountered in the development of tribal economy with special reference to Attappady. He stated that there is a total lack of economic rationality in decision making in the case of the tribal. There is an obvious development gap between the dwindling tribal sector and the fast expanding settler sector. There is a great disadvantage in the asymmetric growth of the two sectors. Immigrants are getting richer, while there is precipitous deterioration of cultivable land. The consequent proletarianisation of the tribal has assumed alarming proportions.

Mathur (1980)²⁵ deals with the most primitive community of Kerala – the Cholanaickans. He states that their habitat is bountiful with forest products such as cardamom, honey, dammar, wax, pepper, ginger and a host of other invaluable and rare herbs, creepers etc. They depend on trade with Non-Wood Forest Produce (NWFPs) contractors for the supply of salt, rice and other necessities. Mathur is of the opinion that problems in development arise because of physical inaccessibility of the area and the lack of communication facilities. According to him, they are in

immediate need of development aids based on a more realistic and practical approach. He lists out the main constraints for their upliftment viz, pre-agricultural level of technology, extremely low level of literacy and near stagnant population.

Vyas and Menon (1980)²⁶, in 'Indian Tribes in Transition,' state that in the broad matrix of Indian society, although numerically small, the representation of tribes is culturally effective and significant. Because of a certain degree of isolation and subsequent growth of cultural contact, the influence of certain caste traits over the life and culture of certain tribes are inevitable. They are of the opinion that social changes are brought about not by mere provision of education but with the help of public opinion and citizens awareness programmes. Also it is time for the countervailing forces like regulation of credit and market to be properly channelised. Further, peer groups among the tribals should come forward to mobilise public opinion through properly phased programmes.

Singh (1982)²⁷ presents the economy of the tribe through specific case studies from different parts of the country. The diversities of regional situations and multiple processes of transition are dealt with similar case studies. He focuses on change and transformation of modes of production, including the relations of production. He also raises the larger issues of the relationship of the tribal economy with society.

An attempt has been made by Kunhaman (1982)²⁸ to analyse the underlying factors responsible for intra regional variations in the socio-economic living standards of the tribal communities in Kerala. He has ascertained that the rulers of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore have protected the tribal population in varying degrees. While examining the economic evolution of the tribes the author puts forward a protection hypothesis and states that the tribes in the northern region of the State have better socio economic standards as a result of the better protection policy of the rulers

there. It is, however, the first socio-economic work on tribals in Kerala and provides an insight into the economic levels of the different communities and forms a base for further studies of this aspect.

The work by Kattakayam (1983)²⁹, is a detailed empirical study of the social structure of the Uralis, a primitive tribe in Kerala. The author analyses in detail the failure of various welfare programmes, agricultural programmes, social and cultural programmes and health programmes and examines the causes of their failure. One of the major causes identified by the author is the exploitation of the Uralis by the non-tribal. Being naïve and innocent, they have fallen easy victims to the perjuries and forgeries of the so called civilised. The study is mainly based on Participant. Observation Method aimed at examining the social structure on social processes among the tribal communities to find out how they contribute to acceleration of change in the tribal communities.

Tiwari (1983)³⁰ in his book 'Development Strategy for Forest Tribal and Environment,' deals with the continuing degradation of forests which has led to environmental hazards in the form of floods soil erosion, desertification, silt damages, droughts and weather disruptions. Since tribal economy and forest development are mutually dependent, if forests were to be destroyed, the tribal too would perish. Trees have a very important place in the economic and cultural life of tribal and the tie between the two can be strengthened, according to him, by adopting agro forestry appropriate technology in shifting cultivation and Integrated Rural Development Programme. Tiwari maintains that India faces a dual crisis of environmental degradation and rural poverty.

The monograph 'Economic Differentiation and Tribal Identity' by Shah (1984)³¹, is a study of Chaudhris in Gujarat. It examines the tribe as a part of the

larger Indian society which is following the capitalist path of development. It is argued that the direction of change in the tribal society is similar to that in the larger society, and the nature and direction of change in the larger society greatly influence the internal structure and the life style of the tribal society and that the unity is getting eroded and class formation is taking place among the tribal.

Takur (1986)³² highlights the socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Tribes inhabiting different parts of India and looks into the impact of development programmes on their socio-economic conditions in general and on the Santhals of Bihar in particular.

Tribal interests were neglected even after the departure of colonial rulers. Independent India's need for revenue from the forests and raw materials for industries continues to deprive the tribal. Fernandes and Kulkarni (1986)³³ dealing with the rural economy and its incessant problems state that industrialists view the forest as a source of revenue, but for the tribal people it is the very basis of their economic, social and cultural life.

Mohandas (1986)³⁴ has studied the impact of development projects in the Western Ghats region on the forest dependant population with special reference to the tribes in Wayanad district. He states that the most adverse ecological consequences of the development projects has been studied in terms of income, employment, landholding and frequency of food intake. Impact on forest dependence was done in terms of changes in the principal source of income and employment and derived from forest.

Fernandes, Menon and Vegas (1988)³⁵ in 'Forests, Environment and Tribal Economy,' studied the state of Indian forests and the results of massive deforestation and its effect on the tribal sector.

Haimendorf (1988)³⁶ points out the capitalist path of development on contributing to acculturation of tribal communities and highlights the exploitation of tribals in the interaction with encroachers and deceitful non-tribal. He analyses the process of expropriation of tribal people in the interaction with encroachers and deceitful non-tribals. He analyses the process of expropriation and oppression in some selected tribal areas, in Andhrapradesh.

Paul (1988)³⁷ has made an attempt to examine and compare the extent of inter and intra communal variation in the level of socio-economic conditions of the hill tribes and to understand the possible reasons for such variations. An effort is made to investigate the impact of the planned economic development programmes of the state government on the hill tribes with a specific aim to see if there is any spatial or communal variation in it. The agrarian structure and transformation in the context of the changes in production forces and production relationship showed wide fluctuations in land holdings or land leases among different tribal communities in Wayanad. A dichotomy exists in the wage structure between the tribal and non-tribal. The system of bonded labour underwent relative changes and it transformed into a similar pattern of attached labour in order to fulfil the needs of the labour class. The author offers an explanation for the existence of spatial disparity in the adjustment process of the tribes in response to the progress of developmental programmes.

Sharma (1989)³⁸ in his 'Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes' states that investigation of the constitutional safeguards for about a quarter of the country's population, located at the margin, struggling for equity and justice against adverse forces, rooted both in the traditional and also the nascent social and economic order, is a necessary task. The situation of tribal areas is reported as disquieting. According to him, they are continuously losing command over their

resources on almost all counts - pressure from more advanced people, claims of the state in utter disregard of their traditional rights and virtual forced displacement in favour of a verity of development projects, big or small. The situation on the wage front too is depressing. He states that the tribal people are at a crucial point in their history where they are obliged to be content with an unfamiliar formal system of the State, unknown forces of new economies and uninhibited intrusions by other people while their own system has been rendered weak and superfluous for want of recognition. According him, there are two facts of the present tribal scene, firstly, each community or even part thereof may be facing a unique configuration of socio-economic forces. Secondly, the problems in all cases are essentially those of transition. The Commissioner further States that Articles 275 (1) of the Constitution provides for automatic devolution of funds for tribal welfare at the moment the need is established. However, the system is not functioning as envisaged in the Constitution and it is sad that the tribal people suffer and even face penal action for acts of omission and commission to the state.

In 'Tribal Economy in India,' Danda (1991)³⁹ highlights various aspects of the Indian tribal situation. Several tribal communities have either changed or have merged with other communities. There are some who have undergone transformation of their identity altogether.

Muraleedharan and Sankar (1991)⁴⁰ examined human ecology and socio-economic interaction between the tribals and other communities of Attappady. Based on primary data, the study has revealed that the socio-economic conditions of the tribals have been adversely affected as a result of land use changes. Land degradation and land marginalization are the major problems in their study area.

Radhakrishna (1991)⁴¹ in his study reveals that the intensity of tribals of Wayanad on traditional system of medicines has declined. Indigenous health systems were discouraged and a new health culture was promoted that forced the individual to depend on modern drugs and other medicinal interventions. The study also proved that the health status among the tribals of Wayanad were very poor mainly due to their social and economic disabilities.

Dashora (1992)⁴² considers that the tribals are losing their identity because of the rapid development of trade, transportation and communication, provision of reservations, educational services and equal political status. The author further quotes certain examples of dilution of tribal culture. The study concludes that the horizontal distances are shrinking by leaps and bounds. Tribal who are driven to an inhospitable environment has come never to the mainstream society and are growing conscious of their civic, economic and social rights. It has brought about a great change in the tribal people.

Basha (1992)⁴³ in 'Impact of Forest Policies on Tribal Life,' explains the various Forests Acts and Policies of India. The tribal once enjoyed absolute freedom in the forests and used the natural resources prudently. They were the worst affected during the various periods of development and as a result they are still lowest in the economic ladder. The author states that the forest policies and the appurtenant forest laws of the British Colonial period did not help to better their lot economically and socially.

'Facts and Figures,' published by the Forestry Information Bureau and Kerala Forest Research Institute (1994)⁴⁴ is result of socio-economic survey conducted on the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes in the forest regions of Kerala.

Socio Economic status on Tribal Communities has been compiled by the State agencies such as Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Forest Department, Census Department, Planning Commission, Directorate of Tribal welfare and various research institutions like Kerala Institute for Research, Training and Development Studies of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (KIRTADS) and Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI).

The review of related works reveals the following. Earlier studies on tribal communities can be broadly classified into two heads (1) Impact of deforestation in the tribal areas and (2) Socio-economic conditions of the tribals. They compare statutory commission reports, departmental reports and studies by institutions and individuals. All the available studies seem to be emphasising the need for considering the tribal economy with any of the programmes of forest as the tribes has symbiotic relationships with forests. Some of these studies stress the need for the establishment of forest based industries for tribal development. But the constraints relating to the impact of deforestation on the tribals have not been analysed adequately.

The present study is designed to examine the impact of deforestation on the socio-economic conditions of the tribals in Idukki District which has not been touched upon by others. Studies on socio-economic impact of deforestation on tribal life is relevant in this context and hence the present study.

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