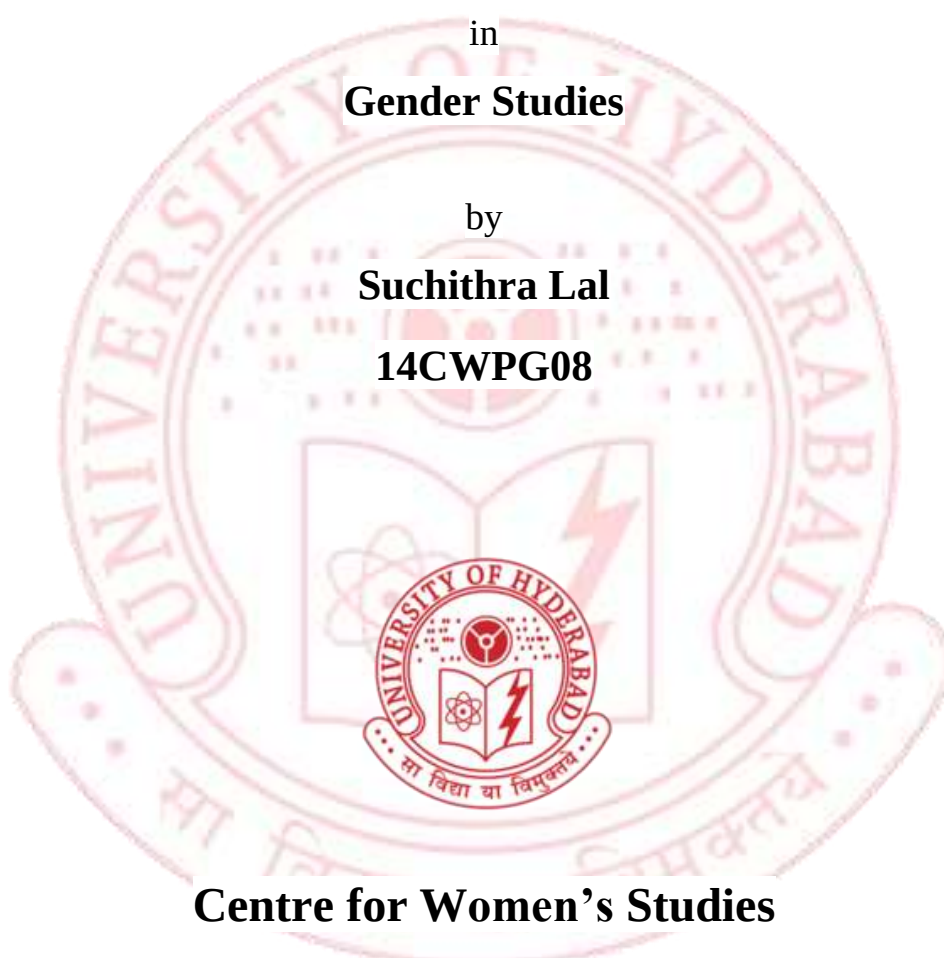


**From Self-Reliance to State Welfare Schemes  
A Study of Tribal Communities in Attappady  
from a Gender Perspective**

**A Thesis Submitted During 2022 to the University of Hyderabad  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Award of a Ph.D. Degree**

in  
**Gender Studies**

by  
**Suchithra Lal**  
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**June 2022**



## **Certificate**

This is certify that the thesis entitled **“From Self-Reliance to State Welfare Schemes: A Study of Tribal Communities in Attappady from a Gender Perspective”** submitted by **Suchithra Lal** bearing Registration Number **14CWPG08** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of Doctor of Philosophy in **Gender Studies** from Centre for Women’s Studies, School of Social Sciences is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

**This thesis is free from Plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.**

Further, the student has the following publication(s) before submission of the thesis/monograph for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in the relevant area of her research

1. Research Paper titled “Tribal Women and Land Rights: A Study of the Irula Tribal Communities of Attappady Tribal Region of Palakkaad District in Kerala” has been accepted for publication in the special issue for Human Organization Journal with ISSN Number 0018-7259.

and

has made presentations in the following conferences:

1. Presented a paper titled “Changing Livelihood Practices of Tribal Women in Kerala with Special Reference to Attappady Tribal Region” in the International Interdisciplinary Winter School on the theme Endangered Cultures and Sustainability with Special Reference to Tribal and Folk Communities in India held at Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh, 8-12 January, 2018.
2. Presented a paper titled “Indigenous People and Sustainable Livelihood Development: A Study of Primitive Tribal Groups in Kerala” in the XII International Conference on ‘Hunters and Gathering Societies’ held at University Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia, 23-27 July 2018.

Further, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfilment of coursework requirement for Ph.D.

| Course Code | Name                                        | Credits | Pass/Fail |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| GS 801      | Feminist Theories                           | 4       | PASS      |
| GS 802      | Gender Studies: Concepts and Contexts       | 4       | PASS      |
| GS 826      | Feminist Research Methods                   | 4       | PASS      |
| GS 832      | Tribal Development and Empowerment of Women | 4       | PASS      |

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### **Declaration**

I, **Suchithra Lal**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**From Self-Reliance to State Welfare Schemes: A Study of Tribal Communities in Attappady from a Gender Perspective**” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Prof. K Suneetha Rani is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

|       |                                          |
|-------|------------------------------------------|
| ADSS  | Adivasi Dalit Samara Samiti              |
| AGMS  | Adivasi Gotra Maha Sabha                 |
| AHADS | Attappady by Attappady Hill Area Society |
| ASHA  | Accredit Social Service Activist         |
| ATCOS | Attappady Co-operative farming society   |
| AVIP  | Attappady Valley Irrigation Project      |
| AVM   | Adivasi Vimochana Munnani                |
| BPL   | Below Poverty Line                       |
| CHC   | Community Health Centre                  |
| DPEP  | District Primary Education Programme     |
| FHC   | Family Health Centres                    |
| IAY   | Indira Awas Yojana                       |
| ICDS  | Integrated Child Development Scheme      |
| IMR   | Infant Mortality Rate                    |
| IRDP  | Integrated Rural Development Programme   |
| ITDP  | Integrated Tribal Development Project    |
| JRY   | Jawahar Rozgar Yojana                    |
| KILA  | Kerala Institute of Local Administration |
| LPG   | Liquefied Petroleum Gas                  |
| MRS   | Model Residential School                 |
| NREGA | National Rural Employment Guarantee Act  |
| NRHM  | National Rural Health Mission            |
| NGO   | Non - governmental Organisation          |

|        |                                                        |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| NFHS   | National Family Health Survey                          |
| NHGs   | Neighbourhood Groups                                   |
| NRLM   | National Rural Livelihood Mission                      |
| NRHM   | National Rural Health Mission                          |
| PMRY   | Prime Ministers Rozgar Yojana                          |
| PESA   | Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 |
| PMAY   | Pradan Mantri Awas Yojana                              |
| PDS    | Public Distribution System                             |
| SSA    | Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan                                  |
| SC     | Scheduled Caste                                        |
| SGRY   | Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana                        |
| SGSY   | Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana                   |
| ST     | Scheduled Tribe                                        |
| TSP    | Tribal Sub Plan                                        |
| TRYSEM | Training For Self-Employment For Rural Youth           |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund                         |

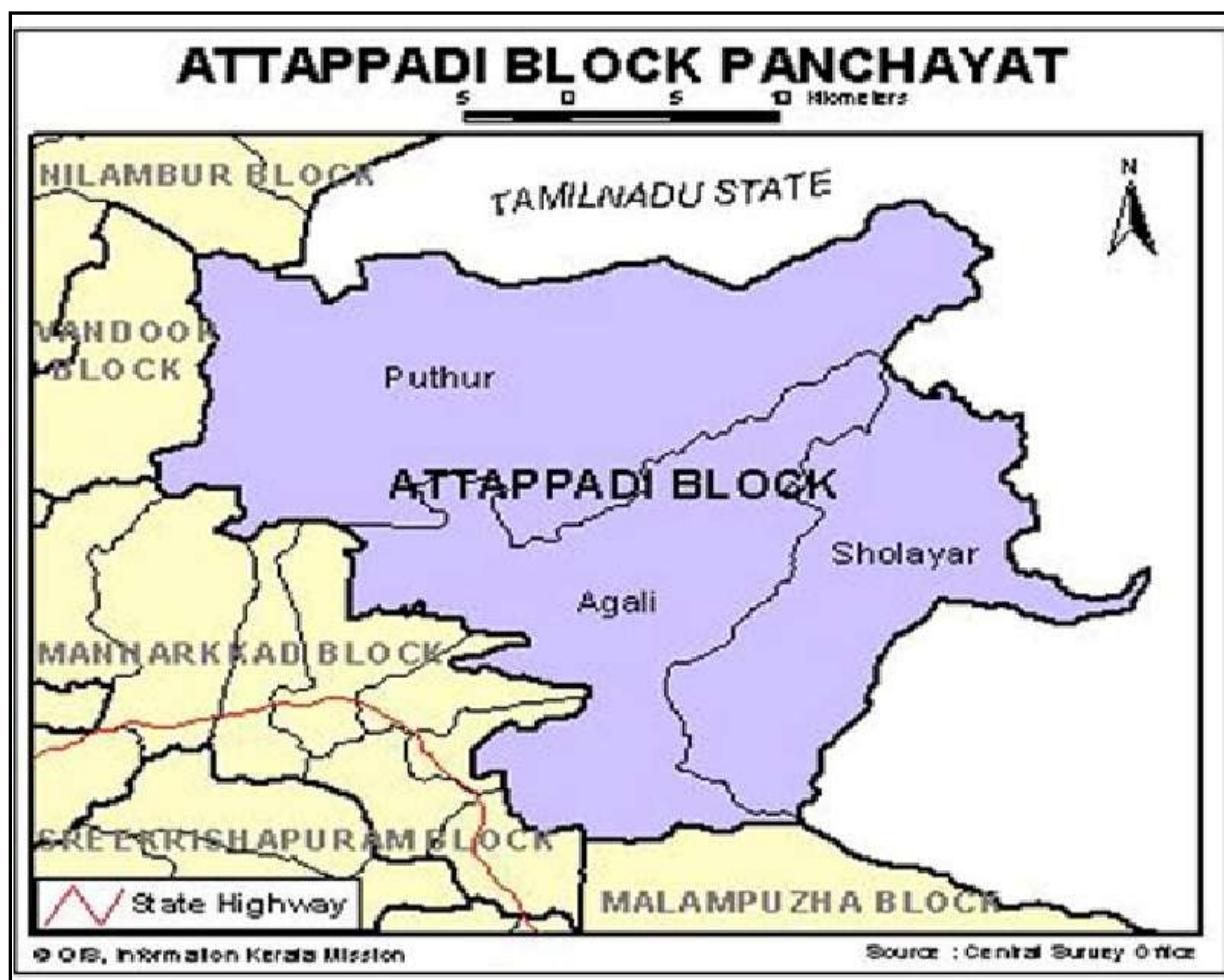
## Map of Palakkad District



Source:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palakkad\\_district#/media/File:Subdistricts\\_of\\_Palakkad.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palakkad_district#/media/File:Subdistricts_of_Palakkad.png)



## Geographical Map of Attappady Block Panchayat



Source: Abdul Latheef K, Smitha P. Kumar and A. B Remashree. "Ethnomedicine Used for Treating Cuts and Wounds by Tribes of Attappady, Kerala." *International Journal of Herbal Medicine* 2, no. 2 (2014): 1-8.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Tribal People of India**

Some tribal communities live in isolation from the larger Indian society as they are used to enjoying the autonomy of governance over the territory they live in. They controlled the land, forest, and other resources and governed themselves according to their laws, traditions, and customs (Xaxa 2011). Thus, the tribal communities could lead a life of isolation where they preserved their culture and lifestyle interlinked with nature. The tribal communities of India are considered to be the earliest inhabitants of the land who had to face multiple waves of invaders and other settlers over thousands of years (Das et al. 2014). In the administrative structure imposed by the colonial powers in India, landlordism was forced upon the tribal communities by introducing revenue for the tribal lands and the forests they occupied (Xaxa 2011). Thus, the tribal communities lost their autonomy over the forests under British rule in the country. The centralised administration by the British rulers applied the same laws, rules and regulations to the tribal communities that they applied to the other social groups and tried to integrate the tribal communities into the revenue structures forcefully.

The tribal communities in India are spread all over the country with diverse socio-cultural variations except in the states of Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi and Puducherry. The population of tribal people in India constitutes 8.6 per cent of India's total population. The highest number of tribal people is concentrated in the North-Eastern states of India. The tribal population in Mizoram constitutes 94.4 per cent of the state's population and is the highest among all the states in India, followed

by Nagaland (86.5%) and Meghalaya (86.1%) respectively, and the lowest population of tribal people is found in Uttar Pradesh constituting 0.6% of the state's population.

There are 661 officially identified tribal communities in India (Census of India 2011), shown in Table 1.1.1. given below.

Table 1.1.1. Tribal Population in India

| <b>State/Union Territory</b> | <b>Population</b> | <b>Proportion of total population</b> | <b>Number of communities</b> |
|------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Madhya Pradesh               | 15316784          | 21.1%                                 | 46                           |
| Maharashtra                  | 10510213          | 9.4%                                  | 47                           |
| Odisha                       | 9590756           | 22.8%                                 | 62                           |
| Rajasthan                    | 9238534           | 13.5%                                 | 12                           |
| Gujrat                       | 8917174           | 14.8%                                 | 29                           |
| Jharkhand                    | 8645042           | 26.2%                                 | 30                           |
| Chhattisgarh                 | 7822902           | 30.6%                                 | 42                           |
| Andhra Pradesh               | 5918073           | 7%                                    | 33                           |
| West Bengal                  | 5296953           | 5.8%                                  | 38                           |
| Karnataka                    | 4248987           | 7%                                    | 49                           |
| Assam                        | 3884371           | 12.4%                                 | 23                           |
| Meghalaya                    | 2555861           | 86.1%                                 | 17                           |
| Nagaland                     | 1710973           | 86.5%                                 | 5                            |
| Jammu & Kashmir              | 1493299           | 11.9%                                 | 12                           |
| Bihar                        | 1336573           | 1.3%                                  | 30                           |
| Tripura                      | 1166813           | 31.8%                                 | 19                           |
| Uttar Pradesh                | 1134273           | 0.6%                                  | 5                            |
| Mizoram                      | 1036115           | 94.4%                                 | 14                           |
| Arunachal Pradesh            | 951821            | 68.8%                                 | 12                           |

|                           |             |       |     |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------|-----|
| Manipur                   | 902740      | 35.1% | 29  |
| Tamil Nadu                | 794697      | 1.1%  | 36  |
| Kerala                    | 484839      | 1.5%  | 35  |
| Himachal Pradesh          | 392126      | 5.7%  | 8   |
| Uttarakhand               | 291903      | 2.9%  | 5   |
| Sikkim                    | 206360      | 33.8% | 2   |
| Dadra&Nagar Haveli        | 178564      | 52%   | 7   |
| Goa                       | 149275      | 10.2% | 5   |
| Lakshadweep               | 61120       | 94.8% | -   |
| Andaman & Nicobar Islands | 28530       | 7.5%  | 6   |
| Daman & Diu               | 15363       | 6.3%  | 5   |
| Chandigarh                | -           | 0%    | -   |
| Delhi                     | -           | 0%    | -   |
| Haryana                   | -           | 0%    | -   |
| Pondicherry               | -           | 0%    | -   |
| Punjab                    | -           | 0%    | -   |
| India                     | 104,281,034 | 8.6%  | 661 |

*Source: Census of India 2011*

The following details about the tribal people in India will give an idea about their status and access to education and livelihood.

Table1.1.2. Profile of Tribal People in India

| Particulars     |                        | Year (2001) | Year (2011) |
|-----------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Population      |                        | 84,326,240  | 104,281,034 |
| Sex Ratio       |                        | 978         | 990         |
| Literacy        |                        | 47.1%       | 59%         |
| Male literacy   |                        | 59.2%       | 68.5%       |
| Female literacy |                        | 34.8%       | 49.4%       |
| Occupation      | Cultivators            | 44.7%       | 34.5%       |
|                 | Agricultural labourers | 36.9%       | 44.5%       |

*Source: Census of India 2001 & 2011*

The tribal population in India has increased over the recorded decades and now they are more than ten crores in number. The sex ratio among the tribal people is estimated to be 990 females for every 1000 males (Census of India 2011), which is greater than the national sex ratio of the total population in India, that is, 940 females for 1000 males. There is a steady increase in the literacy rates among the tribal people of India from 47.1% to 59.0% between 2001 and 2011. But when compared with the national literacy rate of other communities, which is 74.04%, this number is glaring. There is also a tremendous difference observed between the male and female literacy rates among the tribal populations themselves. There are more literate males than females with a percentage of 68.5%, while the latter stands at 49.4%. It indicates that the tribal women are still in a position where they have less access to education due to multiple factors.

## **1.2 The Tribal Development Programmes in India**

The evolution of tribal development in the country began after the independence with programmes to ‘assimilate’ the tribal communities into the ‘mainstream society’ (Harsh Mander 2012). The tribal development projects were implemented through the constitutional provisions in India for the socio-economic development of the tribal people (Gupta 2018). The plans for the implementation of the programmes were made an integral part of the five-year plans. Several schemes for tribal development are still active today. Some of the programmes include the community development programme, multipurpose tribal blocks, tribal development blocks, development agencies, integrated tribal development projects, the Tribal Sub-Plan, dispersed tribal development programmes, and so on (Suresh 2014).

Apart from the five-year plans and the TSP, the government also implemented several schemes for tribal development. The major schemes introduced were the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), Prime Ministers Rozgar Yojana (PMRY), Training For Self-Employment For Rural Youth (TRYSEM), Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 [PESA], State/UT Minor Forest Produce Act, Kudumbasree, NREGA, Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), Integrated Child Development programme, and others.

The tribal areas are covered with natural vegetation and minerals. These are the areas that always get exploited by the state in the name of national development. One can see how development programmes such as hydroelectric projects, mining, dams, and even the so-called ‘welfare programmes’ encroach into the tribal regions,

displacing the tribal communities and depriving them of their livelihood sources. Thus, many tribal communities had to temporarily migrate across the country in search of job opportunities in the construction sector or as labourers in industries in big cities or as petty vendors who inhabit the footpaths.

### 1.3 Tribal People in Kerala

The tribal people in Kerala mostly dwell in the interior parts of dense forests. They used to be nomadic people who lived in caves and tree huts. They practised shifting cultivation and pastoralism and collected minor forest products such as honey, medicinal plants, herbs, fodder and other items. They survived on roots and shoots, uncooked animal flesh and fruits and berries from the forests. With the influence of the colonisers and post-Independence administrators, there was a transformation in the lifestyles of these nomads which resulted in the adoption of settled cultivation.

The tribal people in Kerala constitute 1.45% of the total population (Census of India 2011). There are 36 Tribal communities in Kerala, as reported by the Scheduled Tribe Development Department in 2011. The different tribal people in Kerala are listed in Table 1.3 below.

Table 1.3 Tribal People in Kerala

| Sl No. | Tribal people in Kerala                                                       |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1      | Adiyan                                                                        |
| 2      | Aranda (Arandan)                                                              |
| 3      | Eravallan                                                                     |
| 4      | Hill Pulaya (Mala Pulayan, Kurumba Pulayan, Karavazhi Pulayan, Pamba Pulayan) |

|    |                                                                                                                   |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5  | Irular, Irulan                                                                                                    |
| 6  | Kadar (Wayanad Kadar)                                                                                             |
| 7  | Kanikkaran, Kanikkar                                                                                              |
| 8  | Karimpalan                                                                                                        |
| 9  | Katunayakan                                                                                                       |
| 10 | Kochuvelan                                                                                                        |
| 11 | Koraga                                                                                                            |
| 12 | Kudiya Melekudi                                                                                                   |
| 13 | Kurichachan (Kurichya)                                                                                            |
| 14 | Kurumans (Mullu Kuruman, Mulla Kuruman, Mala Kuruman)                                                             |
| 15 | Kurumbas (Kurumbar, Kurumban)                                                                                     |
| 16 | Mahamalar                                                                                                         |
| 17 | Malai Arayan (Mala Arayan)                                                                                        |
| 18 | Malai Pandaran                                                                                                    |
| 19 | Malai Vedan (Mala Vedan)                                                                                          |
| 20 | Malakkuravan                                                                                                      |
| 21 | Malasar                                                                                                           |
| 22 | Malayan, Nattu Malayan, Konga Malayan (Excluding the areas of Kasaragod, Kannur, Wayanad and Kozhikode Districts) |
| 23 | Mavilan                                                                                                           |
| 24 | Malayarayar                                                                                                       |
| 25 | Mannan (to be spelt in Malayalam script in parenthesis)                                                           |
| 26 | Muthuvan, Mudugar, Muduvan                                                                                        |
| 27 | Palleyan, Palliyan, Paliyar, Palliya                                                                              |
| 28 | Paniyan                                                                                                           |
| 29 | Ulladan, Ullathan                                                                                                 |



|    |                                                |
|----|------------------------------------------------|
| 30 | Uraly                                          |
| 31 | Mala Vettuvan (Kasaragod and Kannur Districts) |
| 32 | Ten Kurumban, Jenu Kurumban                    |
| 33 | Thachenadan, Thachenadan Mooppan               |
| 34 | Cholanaickan                                   |
| 35 | Malapanikar                                    |
| 36 | Vettakuruman                                   |

*Source: Scheduled Tribal people Development Department 2012*

Each community follows distinct cultures, beliefs, livelihood strategies, social organisation, economy and development perspectives. Five of the tribal communities are designated as ‘primitive tribal people’ on the basis of their living conditions and ecosystem. They are the Kattunayikans of Wayanad district, Koragas of Kasargod district, Cholanayikans of Malappuram district, Kurumbas of Attappady in Palakkaad district and the Kadars of Ernakulam district. Wayanad district has the highest concentration of tribal population in the state, comprising 31.24 per cent of the tribal population of the state which constitutes 18.55 per cent of the district's total population. The second is the Idukki district which constitutes 11.51 per cent of the tribal people and others are distributed across the districts-- 10.1 per cent in Palakkad, 10.08 per cent in Kasargod, 5.52 per cent in Thiruvananthapuram, 8.53 per cent in Kannur, 4.74 per cent in Malappuram and 4.53 per cent in Kottayam respectively. Alappuzha district does not have any recorded tribal community. The tribal people of Kerala vary in their customs, norms, beliefs and languages. Although Malayalam is the mother tongue of other social groups in Kerala, the languages spoken by these tribal communities are different from mainstream Malayalam. They often speak a language that is a mixture of Malayalam and Tamil dialects.

#### 1.4 Tribal Movements in Kerala

In Independent India, and later in Kerala since the state's formation in 1956, the tribal communities had to face acute land loss to the non-tribal migrant settlers. The Reform Movement that the Marxist party spearheaded in restoring some of the lands of the agricultural labourers from the *Janmis* (feudal landlords) but it has not had any impact on the land rights of the tribal communities. The Kerala Scheduled Tribes Act Restriction of transfer of land and Restoration of alienated land was passed by the state government in 1975 to restore the lands that were occupied by the settlers on or after 1 January 1960, but it did not take the period between 1950 and 1960 into consideration (Raman 2004). The Act was later amended as the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Amendment Act 1996 (Bijoy 1999), which was later repealed by the President of India. It is evident from these facts and the existing literature that the State has always supported the migrant settlers who took over the tribal lands and the tribal communities but did not care to implement the Land Restoration Act.

The land eviction and the non-implementation of the Tribal Land Act by the state denied the rights of the tribal communities to practise their traditional occupations. The movement for asserting rights over the land was also their struggle to survive in this manner. In Kerala, starvation deaths in tribal communities were reported between 1999 and 2001 (Sreerekha 2010). Many tribal movements sprung up in different parts of Kerala as a result of this. The demands raised by the Adivasi Gotra Maha Sabha (AGMS) led by the tribal woman activist C.K. Janu came about as a result of the false hope that was continuously given by the government of Kerala (Bijoy and Raman 2003). The Adivasi Vimochana Munnani (AVM), Adivasi Dalit Samara Samiti (ADSS) were also formed during this time. In 2001, the tribal

communities demanded land for rehabilitation from the state government and to include these lands in the Fifth schedule. But, the government did not distribute the land after reaching the agreement. Hence, the movement for land assertion began in Muthanga of Wayanad district. The state violently suppressed this revolt by the tribal communities during the Muthanga land struggle.

### **1.5 Status of Tribal Women in Tribal Communities**

Tribal women constitute half of the population in tribal communities. The tribal women work harder than their male counterparts in the households, and even outside, as a majority of them are engaged in informal labour either in the construction sector, as footpath vendors, and as the industrial or agricultural labourers. They have more freedom to work outside their houses when compared to women from other social groups, but they also experience certain taboos, stigmas and cultural constraints. They participated less in the labour market due to factors like their ethnic identity, lack of access to education, and their remote location of living inside or close to the forest. Thus, they have limited opportunities when compared to women of other social groups in society. Their position of marginality also has an effect on their health condition. While they are almost entirely responsible for sustaining their households, they face higher infant mortality rates, the incidence of sickle cell anaemia, low nutrition level, and lower life expectancy when compared to the population in the rest of Kerala.

### **1.6 Income and Livelihood Opportunities**

Most of the Adivasi groups derived their livelihoods from agriculture and forest, and as different from the other social group communities, their dependence on the forest, for a variety of purposes, is substantial (Krishna 2004). Forest and land-

based resources were the backbones of the traditional economy of the tribal people, whether it was settled or shifting cultivation. The land is the most valuable, tangible productive asset for the people living in tribal areas. The tribal people have followed and implemented their own rules to use this land. In that way, all the land in a particular settlement may belong to the head of the community i.e., the *Ooru Mooppan*. Once the other social groups started to encroach upon the lands of the tribal people, their traditional economy began to change and they turned into labourers in the settlers' fields.

The livelihood and habitat of the tribal people are closely associated with the forest; that is, their basic needs centre around the forest which provides them with shelter, occupation and employment. They are heavily dependent on nature, which is a part of their forest culture. For the tribal people, the forest has been a major source of food, timber for house construction and agricultural implements, firewood, medicines, etc. Tribal people were also dependent on forest foods such as leaves, fruits, some edible roots, flowers and tubers during the lean season. Wild fruits, honey and berries were also collected and preserved as food items. The bamboo and timber used for house construction and agriculture were also collected from the dense forests. Herbs, plants and roots from wild trees and shrubs were used and prescribed for medicinal purposes.

They chose to settle in the forests mainly to preserve the space than to destroy it. As a result of industrialisation, many policymakers and other social groups came up with several development programmes which exploited the forest area and displaced tribal people from the forests by pushing them towards isolated and segregated places. The main issue that the tribal people face today is land appropriation, being misused and exploited by the mainstream society in several states

of the country. Thus, they lost their indigenous and traditional economic activities and adopted non-traditional economic activities.

### **1.7 Indigenous Healthcare Practices of Tribal People and the Modern Healthcare**

Health is considered to be the overall well-being of body and mind essential to perform various activities in life. The concept of health is also associated with social, cultural, economic and biological factors accompanied by factors such as family, caste and class that affect one's access to better living standards. Most of the time, it is the poor social conditions of a person that affect one's health and they vary from person to person. Not only the health condition, but the treatments, beliefs and healing practices also vary with different communities. Healthcare practices are indicative of the multidimensional approach employed by a people consisting of various religious attitudes, political ideologies, world views, educational backgrounds, natural resources, food production, socio-cultural practices, hygiene and sanitation, environmental hazards and their population structure.

Health is an important issue that needs to be addressed in tribal India. Several parts of the country, especially rural India, face problems in implementing development programmes related to health. The health and nutritional conditions of the tribal people in India remain unchanged by the development programmes. It is found that many of the tribal women suffer from certain nutritional anaemia and high maternal and infant mortality issues. Because of the poor environmental safety situations and unhygienic lifestyles and practices, tribal people suffer from epidemic diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, dysentery, and water-borne diseases.

Apart from modern healthcare practices, the tribal people also give importance to indigenous medicines. Their healthcare system is closely related to their

environment and socio-cultural beliefs. Tribal communities in India are dependent on their culture and customs to develop the treatments they practice. Their healthcare practices and therapies are a reflection of their habitat, ideas, knowledge, beliefs, customs, and traditions gleaned from their natural surroundings. They preferred their traditional medicinal healing techniques which were easily available and accessible to them. However, these treatment techniques, which were purely based on people's knowledge and oral traditions, changed with the socio-cultural changes brought about by globalisation and development programmes. This shift towards modern medicinal techniques brought about a lot of health problems among the communities due to their lack of access to public health centres, lack of transport and communication, and ecological conditions.

## **1.8 Conceptual Framework**

The main concern of this thesis is to examine how the state welfare programmes have been designed with the tribal women at the centre and how the tribal women have responded to the same. The following section discusses tribal women and their livelihood, and development.

### **1.8.1. Tribal Women in Development**

This research employs a critical perspective to understand the development agenda of the state with respect to tribal women, who are confined to performing household responsibilities and are double-burdened with the responsibilities of welfare programmes. Their responsibilities and work only increase as their economic situation worsens. In this manner, the work time of the women inside and outside their households increased, whereas the men spent limited time on these responsibilities, and spent their time for themselves. Despite their strenuous labour, women's earnings

are considered secondary in the household; the state's biased approach towards tribal women's empowerment has only further reinforced their gender roles of reproduction and nurturing. The economic status of the tribal women has not improved in the recent past, including their rights and access to land. They are marginalised within their households, and so, have no autonomy to make decisions regarding agriculture, which requires access to land. The violence against tribal women within the community and the mainstream society has also remained the same.

### **1.8.2.Livelihood**

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (both material and social resources) and activities required for earning a living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shock, and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (Chambers & Conway, 1991). The livelihoods of tribal communities are connected to their ecosystem which mainly comprises the forest and land, such as agriculture and non-timber forest produce. The livelihood shock of a person or a community affects their social, economic and political status in multiple ways. It might also affect their customs and beliefs, health and living conditions, social relations, decision-making power and autonomy, and their access to resources such as education, irrespective of their gender, class or caste. While natural degradation occurs due to external factors (other social groups and the state), in return it affects the resources of the tribal communities. Thus, the livelihood sources and patterns of the tribal communities have been in transition for many years. This affected the work participation of tribal women also within the tribal community. Moreover, the impact of environmental degradation always comes back to women, especially tribal women. Bina Agarwal (2016) states that women from poor households are more affected by

environmental degradation as they are regularly dependent on the forest for fuel, fodder and wild tubers. Household responsibilities are always imposed upon women, and so, they have to arrange food for the entire family. In such cases, the inadequacy of resources adds to the pressure on them.

## **1.9 Profile of the Study Area**

This section attempts to describe the geography, landscape and location of Palakkad District where Attappady, the field of this research, belongs. It also introduces the tribal communities of Attappady.

### **1.9.1. Palakkad District**

Palakkad, ranging from the Palakkad Gap in the Western Ghats, is considered one of the gateways to Kerala. The total area of the district is 4,480 sq. km (1,730 sq. mi), which constitutes 11.5 per cent of the state's area. Out of the total area of the district, about 1,360 sq. km of land is covered with forests. Most parts of the region fall under the midland region except the Nelliampathy-Parambikulam region in Chittur taluk in the south, and the Attappady-Malambuzha region in the north which are hilly regions and are categorised under the highland region.

The climatic condition of the district is pleasant during most months of the year except during summer. The region is blessed with sufficient rainfall and several small rivers which are tributaries of the Bharathapuzha River. A number of dams were built across the rivers and the largest among them is the Malambuzha Dam, while the Parambikulam Dam has the largest volume capacity <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>spb.kerala.gov.in



Palakkad is well-known as the land of palms and paddy fields. It was part of the Malabar District in the Madras Presidency during the colonial years. The district constitutes 8.2 per cent of the state's population and is situated almost at the centre of the state with no coastlines. The district shares its borders with the Malappuram district in the north, the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu in the east, Thrissur district in the south, and in the west, with both Thrissur and Malappuram districts.

Apart from being the largest district of Kerala, Palakkad is renowned as one of the most important agricultural and industrial areas of the state. The primary economic activity of the district is agriculture and it is known as the rice bowl of Kerala, which is followed by the Alappuzha district. More than 88.9 per cent of the district's population is engaged in agriculture and is in rural areas. Because of its shared boundary with Tamil Nadu, there seems to be a mixed culture among the people of Palakkad, and the language itself is a combination of Malayalam and Tamil, marking this mixed culture.

The district is gifted with beautiful forests and eco-tourist places such as Nelliambathy hills, Silent Valley National Park, Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary, the Attappady hills and dams like Malambuzha, Mangalam, Pothundi, Kajirapuzha, Sirunvani, Parambikulam and others.

### **1.9.2. Attappady**

Attappady is situated in the Mannarkkad Taluk of Palakkad district, Kerala. It is situated below the Nilgiri Hills of the Western Ghats. It shares its borders with Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu to the east and Nilgiri Hills to the north, Palakkad taluk in the south and it is surrounded by Karimba, Pottasery and Mannarkkad revenue villages of the Mannarkkad taluk of Palakkad district and Eranad taluk of

Malappuram district in the west. There are 192 tribal hamlets in Attappady. These hamlets are known as *Ooru* locally and each *Ooru* has an average of fifty tribal households. There are three major tribal communities in Attappady, namely, the Irulas, Mudugas and Kurumbas.

#### **1.9.2.1. Irulas**

The Irulas of Attappady are the numerically dominant ethnic group here and were originally inhabitants of Tamil Nadu. The current generation of Irulas in Attappady are descendants of the group that migrated from the Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu in the 16th century. Their mother tongue is also called Irula and they speak both Malayalam and Tamil languages outside their community. Although used to shifting cultivation, they are mainly concentrating on settled agriculture in recent years. The main crops they cultivated were *ragi* or French millet and *chama*, pulses, and oilseeds (like groundnut and castor seeds) (Singh 1994). Nowadays, they are engaged in settled cultivation, animal husbandry, basket and matmaking and informal sector labour as their sources of livelihood.

#### **1.9.2.2. Mudugas**

The Mudugas are the second largest tribal group in Attappady. There is a belief among the Mudugas that they are the real inhabitants of Attappady, who originally came from the lands of Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu (Firoze 2004). The term Muduga originated from their custom of carrying children on their Muthuku (back) which was not practised by other tribal communities in the region. The Mudugas lived in remote areas and kept themselves away from the “civilised” people. The language they speak is the Muduga dialect, which is a mixture of Malayalam and Tamil, with Malayalam as its script. Most of them were non-vegetarians and their diet included

deer, jungle sheep, goat, porcupine, rabbit, and wild domestic fowl. They also consume rice, *ragi*, tapioca and wild roots (Singh 1994). The traditional occupations of the Muduga community are similar to that of the other tribal communities of Attappady, namely, shifting cultivation and selling forest products.

### **1.9.2.3. Kurumbas**

The Kurumbas live in the interior parts of the forest areas. They are considered to be the oldest ethnic group in Attappady and are known as the Palu Kurumbas, who are distinguished from the Alu Kurumbas of the Nilgiris (Firoze 2004) who belong to Tamil Nadu. Etymologically, Kurumba means the one who tends sheep (Singh 1994). They speak Malayalam to communicate with the communities outside. In Kerala, the Kurumbas have several clans such as Bainanal, Ommathnal, Kunnathan, Muruli, Sathan, Kulasthan, Sadiyal, Thuppudanal, Kalapanchan, Egachal, etc. Shifting cultivation was their main livelihood source (Singh 1994). They were also engaged in selling timber, collecting roots and raising livestock.

## **1.10 Chapterisation**

The thesis is organised into seven chapters. It follows the Chicago Manual Style Sheet 17th edition.

The first chapter, Introduction, discusses the tribes in India and Kerala on the basis of their population in the country and the distribution of tribes in each state as well as the tribal groups in Kerala. It is followed by a discussion on the status of tribal women in Kerala, especially the status of marginalised and oppressed women in both the tribal communities and outside society. It also draws an outline of how the tribal development discourse emerged in India and what are the policies and programmes

implemented in post-independence India. The chapter also focuses on various opportunities for generating income among the tribes in India and Kerala, and also on the healthcare practices and the traditions, customs and taboos existing among the tribal communities. It discusses how the modern health technologies influenced the tribal communities, and how they approached these facilities, especially how tribal women face severe health issues because of malnutrition and lack of food. After a broad discussion on tribal communities and their problems, the chapter discusses the three tribal communities selected for the study. It introduces the tribal communities Irula, Muduga and Kurumba who belong to the tribal regions of Attappady in Palakkad and finally, the chapterisation is discussed in the chapter.

The second chapter is titled Research Methodology and Review of Literature. The study was conducted among three tribal communities in Attappady namely Irula, Muduga and Kurumba. After the pilot study, the field study was conducted in three phases. The different tools used for the study were unstructured, open-ended questions, participant observation, focus group discussions, informal conversation, semi-structured interview schedule for the household information, personal narratives and oral history. It was a challenge for the researcher to interview the respondents because they were hesitant to open up since tribes are fed up with answering questions in many surveys happening through various agencies. In such situations, the researcher always made sure to carry the interview through informal conversation to convince the respondents to answer the questions.

I was an outsider as a researcher and an insider as a woman from the same state that the tribal community represents. I observed an invisible wall between me and the respondents. This is why while interviewing the respondents by entering into their space I was always careful while asking questions because of the different

identities of the researcher and the respondents. It is because when to understand how the living conditions of the tribal women have changed, one needs to look at the same with respect to the tribal women's position in the family and the tribal community as well. Only such a perspective would give an insight into intergenerational tribal oppression. Further, any discussion on the matter will be incomplete without addressing the male dominance in land and property rights among the tribal communities. As Harding (2004) rightly argues, that starting research from the reality of women's lives, preferably of those women who are also oppressed by race and class will lead to a more objective account of social reality.

The review of literature attempted to look at three different sections: livelihood and occupation-related studies on tribal communities, education-related studies on tribal people, and health-related studies on tribal people conducted by various authors. Mathur (1977) studies the socio-economic conditions of tribes in Kerala. The book critiques the infrastructural development of tribal communities in Kerala because tribes are underprivileged and consequently burdened by bonded labour, socio-political status, education and land rights. Kunhaman (1995) noted the agricultural transformation of tribes through the migration of other social groups from the Travancore region of Kerala to tribal regions. He observes the effects of the loss of land and its consequences on the economic condition of tribes in Attappady. In the paper "Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihood Issues of Tribesfolk: A Case Study of Periyar Tiger Reserve" (2001), Abraham et.al, observe how the state suppressed the free mobilisation of tribes in a tiger reserve in the name of conserving wildlife. It is discrimination against tribes and their right to utilise natural resources as means of subsistence. Suresh, in the paper "From Subsistence Agriculture to Wage Labour: Tribal Socio-Economic Transformation"(2001), discussed the alienation among tribes

and their loss of self-sufficiency due to changing agricultural patterns and land appropriation. *Livelihood and Gender: Equity in Community Resource Management* (2004) by Krishna observes gender segregation in new forms of agriculture. Rao (2005) discusses the food insecurity meted out to the rural poor. The paper observes that denial of land rights to rural women is the basic reason for their deprivation in agriculture production, financial stability and food security. Mishra (2007) observes in his paper that livelihood changes affect women more intensively than men. In the book *Gender, Food Security and Rural Livelihoods* (2007), Krishnaraj discussed that women in rural areas have less access to resources. Shalingpilang (2012) discusses women's decisive role in the matrilineal Kasi tribe. The paper states that Kasi women are not enjoying equal status with men even though the society is matrilineal. Xaxa et.al. observe in their book *Social Exclusion and Adverse Inclusion Development and Deprivation of Adivasis in India* (2012) that multiple forms of exclusion are being experienced by tribal communities in India on account of development programmes. Munushi (2012) points out the after-effects of land expropriation and forest degradation among Adivasi women and their economy.

*Education and Literacy programmes in India* (1992) by Chaudhari observes the difficulty in access to formal education among Lepchas of Darjeeling. Dunn (1993) observes the gender inequality in the education of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of India. There is a wide gap in the literacy rate of men and women due to a smaller number of women enrolling in formal education. Panda (2011) observes the smaller number of tribal girls enrolling in schools due to the lack of residential schools in Asian countries. Kakkoth, in "Unheard Voices: A Study on the Perceptions of Tribal School Drop-outs in Kerala" (2012), observes the

mainstreaming of school curricula in Kerala and points out the poor quality of the education system for tribal children.

Maiti et.al, point out the health problems faced by tribal women in Jharkhand. *Anthropology of Primitive Tribes in India* (2006) by Sharma illustrates the health status of different tribal groups in India. The book discusses that illiteracy, ignorance, low socioeconomic conditions, lack of drinking water, and poor sanitation are some of the reasons for the poor health condition of tribes. Reddy, in her paper “Health Status of Tribal Women and Children: An Interdisciplinary Approach”(2008), observed less nutrition and work burden on tribal women. Wan et.al, in “Forest, women, and health: Opportunities and Challenges for Conservation”(2011), discuss the health issues of forest-dwelling women in developing countries. Mishra and Sharma, in “Understanding Health and Illness among Tribal Communities in Orissa”(2011), discuss the healthcare patterns among tribes in Orissa through secondary sources. Odisha reports a high infant mortality rate among tribal communities due to the high incidence of under nutrition compared to overall India. Chatterjee et.al, in “Livelihood and Health Issues and Process in Rural Development”(2013), discuss the development initiatives to improve the socio-economic life of the Lodhas in a village in Paschim Medinipur district, West Bengal.

Chapter 3, titled Irulas, Kurumbas and Mudugas of Attappady, attempts to profile the three tribal communities. The Irulas are the largest tribal group in Attappady. According to the Census Report 2011, there are 26,521 Irulas distributed across 149 hamlets in Attappady. The Mudugas live mainly in the forest areas of the south-western foothills and the southern part of the valley. They are distributed across 24 hamlets of the Agali and Pudur panchayats, the population strength being 3497 in each one of them. The Kurumbas live in 19 hamlets in the interior parts of the

Attappady forest range. The 2251 members of the tribal population are distributed across 10 to 250 households in each hamlet. Each hamlet of the tribal communities has 20 to 180 houses. The three tribal communities live in small huts constructed with bamboo woven like baskets, and plastered on the inside with clay. Presently, these houses are being rebuilt with the aid of government funds. Scarcity of community land becomes a limitation to construct houses in the hamlets. So, the present houses are constructed in a limited space and very close to one another. These constraints resulted in an inadequate drainage system, lack of toilet facility and space for cattle herding.

There is a similarity in the hamlet councils of these three tribal communities. In each tribal hamlet in Attappady, there is a council to maintain the law and order in the community and also to take care of the people in the hamlet. The council includes the *Ooru Mooppan*, *Mannukkaran*, *Vandari* or *bandari*, the treasurer; a *Karutalai*, who is the junior headman; and, *Jathikkaran*, another headman of the settlement (Kalathil 2004, Velluva 2006 and Poyil 2009). Except for *Ooru Mooppan* and *Mannukkaran* the other three council members do not enjoy a significant position in the community. The tribal women do not have any position or rights in a village council. These positions are meant for tribal men only.

The hamlets I visited for the study were distributed across the three panchayats in Attappady. These hamlets are distinct from one another, particularly in terms of their location, and accordingly, their access to educational institutions, hospitals, markets, and availability of job opportunities. The field study was conducted among different age groups of married women between 18-82 because I observed that married women are more marginalised inside the marginalised tribal community on the basis of their education, household responsibility, marital status, occupation and income.



The study is looking at the inter-generational disparities among the respondents influenced by their experiences (as evidenced by their life narratives) and livelihood changes.

The chapter critically examines the implementation of formal education for the tribal women in Attappady. It is found that 33.38% of tribal women could not get formal education due to multiple reasons. There were multiple reasons found during the fieldwork such as their health conditions during childhood, financial problems in the family, the distance of schools from the respondents' hamlet, lack of transport facilities to reach schools, threat from wild animals, the responsibility of younger siblings and so on. The lack of formal school education was a ground reality and a major reason for the deprivation in the lives of the tribal women, especially the Kurumba women. Since Kurumbas lived inside the forest, access to schools was also difficult for them.

Four types of funding schemes were implemented for providing housing to the tribal communities, such as the One Lakh Housing programme, Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), the Kurumba package, and AHADS in the visited hamlets. The thesis looks at the basic amenities of tribal communities such as LPG, electricity, toilets, drinking water sources such as Jala Nidhi, borewell, well, river and stream. It is found that 3.77 per cent of households depend on LPG, and the rest depend on firewood for cooking. It is understood that 87.16 per cent of households are electrified and the rest are dependent on kerosene; it is distributed through the Public Distribution System. 69 per cent of households have a toilet facility. Regarding the utilisation of drinking water sources, 25.66 per cent of households, including Irulas and Mudugas, have access to Jala Nidhi. It is also found that except for Kurumbas the other two tribal communities have the facility to utilise borewell and well. Though some households

from Irula and Muduga communities are still dependent on rivers and streams, it is largely Kurumba communities that depend on rivers and streams for drinking water.

In the study area, it has been found that three Family Health Centres (FHC) and 28 sub-centres are distributed in the three panchayats of Attappady; there is one Community Health Centre (CHC) in Agali, one Government Tribal Specialty hospital with 54 beds in Kottathara and 28 sub-centres elsewhere. Three mobile health units provide healthcare assistance in the hamlets once a month for the elderly and pregnant women. Around 85 ASHA workers were appointed for the daily monitoring and distribution of essential medicines.

It has been observed about the educational facilities to the tribal communities in Attappady that there was only one Model Residential School for tribal children from remote areas, sixteen pre-matric hostels, one Higher Secondary School accordingly for the three panchayats of Attappady block; four Government Lower Primary Schools, one Government Upper Primary School, and one Tribal High School functioning there. It was found that the majority of the children studied in pre-matric hostels and model residential schools because there were still not enough schools for the tribal children in Attappady.

The development programmes implemented for the tribal people in Attappady are the Integrated Tribal Development Project, Attappady Co-operative Farming Society, Attappady Valley Irrigation Project, Attappady Hill Area Development Society, Co-operative society, Integrated Child Development Scheme and Kudumbasree. The next three chapters will be focusing on the welfare programmes and the changes in the living conditions of tribal women in Attappady.

Chapter 4, titled Land, Agriculture and Food Security discusses how land and agriculture are interconnected as it facilitates the important livelihood source for the tribal communities. It is found that there are many changes occurring in the landholdings and consequently in agricultural practices. It depicts the land eviction of tribal communities in Attappady since the 1950s, during the time of the arrival of migrant settlers to Attappady. As per the field study, only 55.84 per cent of households owned land because the rest of the tribal people lost their land to the migrant settlers' encroachment on tribal lands. It is found that land loss was more among the Irula and Muduga communities while it affected the Kurumba community relatively less. There were multiple kinds of dispossession that took place in Attappady when the tribal land was first given to the settlers for agricultural purposes. The landowners were forcefully taken to Mannarkkad in Palakkad to register their land in the settlers' name.

Loss of land leads to loss of shifting cultivation because for shifting cultivation there is more land required. That is why the tribal people have started to depend on cash crop cultivation as it is income-oriented. The community had very little access to markets outside their hamlets, and more importantly, many of their agricultural products like millet crops did not have much demand in the mainstream society. Thus, selling their traditional agricultural products in the market was not a viable source of income for the tribal communities. This is also a reason for their shift to cash crop cultivation. The cash crops majorly grown included pepper, turmeric, ginger, coffee, coconut, areca nut, cashew nut and so on.

While the migrant settlers used bore wells for irrigation, it affected the groundwater source, thus, it affected the tribal people's access to water for daily needs, let alone for irrigation purposes. While irrigation was an obvious necessity to

cultivate crops, it was especially expensive for the tribal people who lived in the hilly terrain, as they had to dig bore wells for the same. There were some subsidies to dig bore wells in Kerala given by the panchayats on the basis of land ownership.

However, the tribal people did not have any documents for their land, and so, the local government has not sanctioned bore well funds to the tribal people. Another reason for the agricultural degradation among the tribal communities was the state intervention, for instance, by means of the welfare policies like housing schemes and the transition of tribal communities from their farmland to the newly built hamlets. The livelihood projects introduced under AHADS disturbed the livelihood sources and patterns of the tribal communities. Later, the sudden closing of the projects in Attappady added to the disturbance. The implementation of hostel education is also a reason for the loss of agricultural practices in Attappady.

The decreasing women's role in agriculture is because of the intervention of cash crops and women's marginalisation in land possession. When the shifting cultivation was practised, men and women equally participated together. But, when it comes to cash crop cultivation, women become marginalised because men become the decision-makers and income holders. The agricultural changes have led to the change in the food pattern of tribal communities. The food patterns of the tribal people in Attappady were closely connected with their shifting cultivation. The Irulas cultivated varieties of food crops including millets, cereals, pulses, and vegetables like yam, bottle gourd, ash gourd, and more than 25 varieties of leafy vegetables in the *panchakkadu* and forests. Therefore the tribal communities used to prepare different types of food with these food crops grown in their lands. *Ragi* (finger millet), *chama* (little millet) and *thana* (foxtail millet) were used instead of rice. Rice was consumed very rarely in a year; thus they consumed millets alone for the rest of the year. The

respondents informed that they used to cultivate the food they need and produce livestock for meat, and milk products. Thus, they did not have to buy anything from outside except salt and dry fish. A large area of land used to be cultivated by the tribal people, but this decreased now due to several reasons, including land encroachment, as mentioned earlier. The chapter also discussed the state's intervention in the food security of the tribal communities. It discusses the Public Distribution System (PDS), and Community Kitchen by Kudumbasree, a National Rural Livelihood Mission in a different time period.

Chapter 5, titled Education, Employment and Health, discusses how formal education plays an important role in the well-being of a community. It determines the socio-economic conditions of a community, as there is a strong connection between education and economic status. Formal education has a positive impact on one's occupational status, economic conditions, mortality, hygiene, health, and the well-being of the family. So, this chapter explores how the education of tribal women brings them forward and helps them find work, and enables them to access healthcare facilities.

As per the findings of the field study, the education level of tribal communities is between the first standard and higher secondary school. It was found that apart from initiating the infrastructural developments in tribal hamlets, the government began to shift the tribal children to Model Residential schools, pre-matric hostels and post-matric hostels in different parts of Kerala. The methods and practices of formal education were quite different from the environment and living conditions of the tribal communities. The indigenous knowledge systems such as shifting cultivation, thrashing and grinding of millet crops, and the seasons to identify the herbs, roots, medicinal plants and food from the forest were passed on from generation to

generation. In the mainstream education system, tribal people could not attain such information. The information obtained through the school curriculum about tribal culture was different from the actual lives of the tribal community; there was not much included about the tribal culture in the mainstream education, to begin with, while it included the history, culture, songs, poems and stories to represent the mainstream society.

Access to school was more of a challenge for the three tribal communities but there is a disparity in it based on the geographical location of the hamlets. The respondents informed that there were multiple reasons identified for the children's reluctance to go to school including poor health in childhood, the financial instability of the family, lack of schools near their hamlet and the lack of transport facilities to reach schools.

When shifting cultivation was affected by many changes brought about by the various welfare programmes implemented in Attappady, the tribal communities faced difficulties in coping with a market-oriented way of life where the people needed the money for everything in their day-to-day life. It led them to find income for survival rather than depend on traditional livelihoods. For the tribal women because of their scant formal education qualifications, unskilled labour is the only option to earn their livelihood. The following section will be discussing the current sources of occupation for the respondents. The respondents majorly depend on agriculture, agricultural labour in the land of migrant settlers, wage labour in NREGA, construction work in tribal hamlets, brick kilns in Tamil Nadu, minor forest produce collection, and work for an NGO in umbrella making, and animal husbandry. Except for wage labour in NREGA the other occupations are seasonal, which is why it is the major source of income for the respondents.

There are three Family Health Centres (FHC) and 28 sub-centres distributed in the three panchayats of Attappady. There is one Community Health Centre (CHC) in Agali, one Government Tribal Specialty Hospital with 54 beds in Kottathara and 28 sub-centres elsewhere. Three mobile health units provide healthcare assistance in the hamlets on a monthly basis for the elderly and pregnant women. Around 85 ASHA workers were appointed for the daily monitoring and distribution of essential medicines. Though healthcare facilities are to be provided free of cost for the tribal people, doctors are absent in Attappady. It is difficult for the tribal people to reach hospitals in emergency situations due to inadequate road connectivity to the hamlets. This majorly affected the Kurumbas since they lived in the interiors of the forest. The hamlets like Galazy, Mele Thudukki, Thudukki, Ooradam, Mele Moolakombu, Murukala and Kinattikkara did not have road connectivity to reach hospitals and travelling by vehicle there is also not possible.

While discussing the health condition of the tribal women, it is important to look at the resources that the respondents use, such as drinking water, food, living environment and sanitation facilities. The respondents did not have access to safe drinking water since it was only provided by the water distribution system of the local self-government. The tribal community used to produce their own food, but it is no longer possible now due to the loss of the land. So, the respondents had to depend on the subsidised rice supplied by the PDS. The respondents pointed out they ate their traditional foods like *ragi* and *chama* in the past, which is why they never had any health problems and they were not had to visit any hospital. But now, they are all going to hospitals and they are not able to bear the expenses to deal with their health problems as they switched to eating rice as their staple food.

When the low intake of nutritious food was combined with strenuous labour, it gave rise to nutritional deficiencies and health problems for the women. Tribal women were underweight and suffered from reproductive health problems. Women had muscle and joint aches and there were more incidences of sickle cell anaemia among the tribal women. The children were also nutrition deficient and underweight. Even when Kerala achieved the highest scores on the Human Development Index in India, the tribal people of Attappady are struggling to find safe food and stay healthy.

Chapter 6 consists of fourteen case studies of the women from the three tribal communities. The case studies bring out the day to day experiences of the tribal women in a conversational and spontaneous manner. The tribal women refer to the utilisation of livelihoods and different sources of occupation that they are engaged in. The women whose case studies are included in this chapter are from different age groups, hamlets and different regions of Attappady. The women, in their narratives, engage with the issues of loss of land, livelihood, forest, shifting agriculture and the indigenous ways of life. They also reflect on the change in their lives in terms of education, occupation, family, responsibilities, healthcare and development programmes. Due to the different age groups of women, their level of formal education is different, but there are some similarities in their dropping out of school, especially the financial problems in the family, parents' lack of interest to send them to school and other barriers like lack of transport, fewer hostels and schools. The respondents said that there are many more facilities now for education than the time they went to school, though the younger generation also went through some issues that affected their formal education. The intergenerational responses revealed that there are some positive and some negative outcomes that emerged due to the changes in the state policies and their implementation. During the time of the respondents



above fifty years, there were plenty of millets, pulses and cereals available to them but they are not available now. When it comes to the younger generation of women in the age group of 18-25 and 26- 33, they have not seen such food grains grown nowadays, because over the past three decades the food patterns of tribal communities have changed. There was shifting cultivation, there were enough resources accessible to the older generations, now these are less available to the younger generations but there are some changes that there are more employment opportunities available these days which were not available during that time. But, when the opportunities increased, facilities increased, but the access to resources decreased. It leads to changes in food security and also the emergence of health problems among tribal women. From the interaction with the respondents, it is understood that they are distressed about the changes happening in their living conditions because of the welfare programmes. The women asked how they can do shifting cultivation when there is no rain, no electric fence and adequate help from the government.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion of the thesis. It highlights the need to examine if the state has taken the needs of the tribal communities while planning and implementing the welfare programmes. Quite often the welfare policies and initiatives fail to result in the well-being of people, especially for the marginalised communities and the tribal people living in the forest. Added to this, the livelihoods of tribal communities are interrupted by welfare programmes. The previous chapters narrate how tribal women are trying to cope with the state introduced welfare programmes in the midst of changing livelihood resources and living conditions. There are many similarities that connect the Irula, Muduga and Kurumba tribal women in the current times of welfare and development despite the differences in their language, culture, lifestyle, location, history and so on. The fieldwork taken up for this research has

identified four major issues that the tribal women are seriously concerned about, because these four issues are decisive in their well-being. They are education, employment, health and transport.

In the light of the high school dropout rate, it is important to understand the formal educational status of the respondents might be different but the reasons for their dropping out are very similar in the case of tribal women of different ages from the three tribal communities. Education still follows the mainstream curriculum and pedagogy which creates hurdles for the tribal students.

When it comes to the utilisation of traditional livelihood sources, the respondents above fifty years had plenty of millets, pulses and cereals when they were young, but for the younger generation, these were not available since their childhood. There was shifting cultivation in the earlier time but there was no income available, but now, there are opportunities to earn income but the availability of their staple food such as millets, pulses and cereals are not available. This has affected their health as well. In such situations, women are distressed about the changes happening in their living conditions due to the welfare programmes. The women respondents emphasised that the government does not support them in agriculture by providing supportive measures such as irrigation facilities, electric fences, and machines for cultivation.

Change, sometimes forced, can be observed in all aspects of the tribal life in Attappady including natural resources, agriculture, land, food security, health, knowledge and others. Intergenerational changes can also be clearly observed in their lifestyle and their aspirations. Welfare programmes have tried to create facilities such as borewells, houses, hospitals, schools and roads according to the standards of the

mainstream, but they are not really accessible to tribal communities due to various reasons. The tribal women wish to bring back those prosperous times of the past but also want to achieve their rights for welfare programmes to help their people.

In order to make the development programmes useful for the tribal communities, they need to focus more on the views and requirements of the tribal communities. It has already been mentioned that the state has not taken the input from the tribal communities before launching the welfare programmes. It is particularly evident in the implementation of AHADS that the tribal people have not been included at the policymaking level.

The findings of the research reveal that the welfare programmes implemented for the tribal communities have made them more dependent on the system. The primary needs of tribal communities that is, land and agriculture, are not addressed by the state. The majority of programmes are biased toward the male gender because it always puts the responsibilities on tribal women's shoulders. The development programmes should strive to preserve the livelihood patterns of tribal communities and ensure that the fruits of development and progress reach the tribal people, particularly tribal women.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Research Methodology and Review of Literature**

#### **2.1 Research Problem**

Women are more prone to challenges than men in rural areas. There are many reasons for such victimisation, the main reason being their minimal access to resources when compared to men. Their lack of access to healthcare, education, freedom from domestic violence, protection of reproductive rights and sustainable livelihoods are some of the major issues contributing to the decline of the social status of women in tribal communities as well as in domestic spaces marked by poverty. Gender inequality is seen as one of the root causes for the subordination of women and their low standards of living. There has been a rapid increase in gender inequality in micro-economic management. Food security is one of the important elements here. Kerala has been witnessing many livelihood struggles among the tribal communities for their subsistence.

The Central and state governments have implemented several plans and policies for the development of tribal people in Kerala, as well as in India. These programmes aim at the well-being of the people in terms of health, education, income, transport and communication, and infrastructure. The tribal communities in Kerala mostly depend on informal sector jobs available in their districts and even outside the state due to the lack of cultivable land and assets. Tribal women also take part in these occupations. In tribal communities, women face more oppression than men. They face deprivation within their societies, and in the outside societies as both ‘women’ and as ‘tribal people’. Though the tribal women enjoy equal social status along with tribal men in their community, some studies have shown that the tribal women face

discrimination inside their community similar to women from other social groups and communities. In a patriarchal society like Kerala, men hold the decision-making power in their households, assets and society, while the women are secluded in their homes. Women are considered inferior to men, and poverty also acts as a catalyst for their deprived status. Tribal women are not allowed to interact with outsiders to their community. They get very limited opportunities to participate in inter-household activities, cultural programmes, and the socio-economic and political activities in the community. The status of tribal women in their own community is deteriorating day by day.

The government has implemented several programmes for rural women, especially tribal women, to tackle their low socio-economic conditions and for better livelihood options to earn their household income and other opportunities. A study conducted in Kerala reports about the tribal women who have to face hurdles to meet their livelihood needs which are also due to the rigidity of community norms and customs, development policies and the negligence of society. Several health problems are reported, especially around the reproductive health of tribal women. The literacy rates of tribal women in Kerala are also comparatively low.

The present study will be focusing on several aspects of the development programmes implemented in Attappady particularly as it was the first Tribal Block Panchayat in Kerala. The state government implemented several programmes, especially for the tribal people in Attappady since 1970 as the planning board considered it the most deprived tribal region in Kerala. The major development programmes implemented in Attappady include the Attappady Co-operative farming society (ATCOS) started in 1975 after the abolition of the Bonded Labour Act, the Attappady Valley Irrigation Project (the 1970s), and finally, the Attappady Wasteland

Comprehensive Environmental Conservation Project implemented along with the Japanese Overseas Economic Co-operation Fund to restore the natural environment of Attappady by Attappady Hill Area Society (AHADS).

## **2.2 Research Questions**

1. How do the tribal women sustain themselves through the existing livelihoods and how do they generate their daily income?
2. What changes did the tribal people observe in their livelihood practices before and after the introduction of welfare programmes in Attappady?
3. What changes did the welfare and development programmes bring for the tribal women, especially in the area of education, employment and health?
4. How did the tribal women respond to welfare programmes? Why and how did they accept or reject the welfare programmes? How did this acceptance or rejection influence their life, status, livelihood, development and lifestyle?

## **2.3 Research Objectives**

1. To study the implementation of tribal welfare programmes pertaining to tribal women.
2. To know about the tribal women's response, reception and resistance to welfare programmes.
3. To analyse the reasons and repercussions of tribal women's reception of the welfare programmes.
4. To understand the change that the welfare programmes have caused in the lives of tribal women.

## **2.4 Area of the Study**

The present study was carried out in the Attappady block of Mannarkkad Taluk in Palakkad District, the first tribal block panchayat in Kerala. There are three Gram Panchayats in Attappady namely, Agali, Pudur and Sholayur. Attappady is part of the Western Ghats and is situated in the natural biosphere of Nilgiri. It is located in the eastern part of Kerala and the northern part of Palakkad bordering the Nilgiri and Coimbatore districts of Tamil Nadu (Velluva 1999). Attappady has a remote hilly terrain populated with 64,318 people from different social groups. The population strength of the tribal communities in Attappady is 9,852. Once the tribal people were the largest groups in Attappady, but now, they only constitute 15 percent of the total population of Attappady (Census 2011). There is a drastic decrease in the tribal population of Attappady due to the influx of migrants from other social groups in other parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The hamlets for the study were chosen from the three Gram Panchayats of Attappady.

## **2.5 Research Methodology**

The study was carried out applying the descriptive research method to meet the objectives of the research. Different methods were used to gather information during the field study. The process of participant observation in their daily activities aided in understanding the respondents' perspectives towards their livelihood changes, education, marital status, life stories, and daily routine in household activities, family relations, customs and practices, participation in welfare programmes and so on. I attended and participated in the respondents' workplaces, farmlands, hospitals, and community kitchens, as well as their neighbourhood group meetings, and also visited their residences.

The different techniques used for the study included unstructured open-ended questions, participant observation, focus group discussions, informal conversations, and semi-structured interview schedules for collecting household information, personal narratives and oral histories. During the field visit, the interviews were carried out in a spontaneous conversational manner to make the respondents feel comfortable responding to the questions. I always made sure not to use my diary and pen to note down their answers in front of the respondents as it would have interfered with the conversations. A voice recorder was used during the field visits with the permission of the respondents to record the conversations to transcribe them later. A field diary was maintained to note my everyday activities in the field and I always maintained a list of plans for the next day of field visit. Maintaining a field diary was particularly helpful during my writing phase.

## **2.6 Respondents**

The respondents for the study were identified through the purposive sampling method. While visiting each tribal household, it was found that the situation of the tribal women in terms of their subsistence was that of a struggle. When visiting the tribal hamlets, it was difficult to find the respondents since they were out of the hamlets during the daytime to work for the NREGA. In such circumstances, most of the respondents were randomly selected and I always made sure to seek their permission to interact with them. For the study, 265 respondents were chosen from the three tribal communities. The proposed number of respondents initially was 100 tribal women from each tribal community. The final list of respondents included 100 Irula tribal women, 100 Muduga tribal women, and, owing to challenging circumstances, the number of respondents from the Kurumba tribal community was confined to 65. The study was carried out across different age groups of tribal women,



specifically among the married tribal women, whose ages ranged from 18 years to 82 years. The intention behind selecting married tribal women was to understand the complexity of the situation and the multiple gender roles that the women had to play and the responsibilities that they had to shoulder.

The unstructured interview method for the field study was developed on the basis of the findings of the pilot study. The first phase of the field study was conducted from October 2017 to June 2018 and the second phase was conducted from November 2018 to December 2018. The field study conducted in two phases helped me to understand the research area in detail. Along with field visits, living in Attappady itself was helpful in understanding the daily lives and interactions of the tribal people. An unstructured interview method was chosen for the study as it helped me to build a rapport with the respondents. Since many government surveys and independent studies are regularly conducted on the tribal people of Attappady by various agencies and researchers, the respondents were hesitant to talk during the fieldwork, but basing my data collection on the unstructured interview method helped me to get the information I needed from the respondents. It was evident from their body language that there was an invisible wall between me and the respondents. In order to avoid that, I consciously tried to dress down and conduct myself informally. I could understand that my appearance as an interviewer visibly affected the respondents and made them maintain a distance from me. The appearance of the interviewer may denote an authority figure to the respondents, so I always tried to wear informal clothes and slippers. I tried to learn the tribal languages to overcome my language barrier as an outsider to the community, and interact with my respondents better.

The initial phase of the study was carried out with help from the ITDP office, and I was assisted by the Scheduled Tribe (ST) Promoters. I could observe that the Scheduled Tribe Promoters showed their superiority over the respondents during the interviews even though he/she also hailed from the tribal community. It was difficult to gather data from the respondents using government sources for the field study because they were scared to disclose certain information.

The gender disparity among the tribal women is multi-layered, mostly in community organisations, due to their lack of access and gender-insensitive welfare policies. The women are trapped in their precarious socio-economic conditions because of inequality. Women are probably the last ones to receive the benefits of the welfare policies when implemented. There are welfare policies and missions such as NRLM, NREGA, NRHM, and NFHS reaching out to women in an inclusive manner. However, it remains a question as to how this inclusion can help women when the system itself has burdened them with household drudgery and nurturing responsibilities while the men are free from them all.

The study attempted to collect information about the lives of the tribal women after the implementation of welfare policies and development activities for the tribal communities from the 1970s (the emergence of tribal development in Attappady was during this time). Oral history and secondary sources have been used to trace the historical context of the tribal communities in Attappady. An unstructured interview schedule, focus group discussions and participant observation were used to collect the information. Owing to the difficulty of finding respondents in these hamlets, I spent time with the respondents at their worksite of NREGA and the umbrella-making sites of the NGOs. In the initial phase of my fieldwork, it was difficult to find respondents from the hamlets because of their NREGA work. The tribal women in Attappady

generally tried to avoid walking alone through the forests because of the many incidents of harassment that they, or the previous generations of tribal women, have faced from the migrant settlers and forest officials. So, they were hesitant to take me to their worksites; especially as it meant that I would have had to walk alone through the forests, as I was not a native to the location. During the second phase of the field study, with the help of an NGO functioning for the tribal communities in Attappady, I could travel and interact with the women at their worksite. I observed that the respondents were not comfortable bringing the ST promoters into the worksite as they were an extension of the state, but they were comfortable speaking in front of the NGO volunteers.

The hamlets were selected randomly according to the ease of access to the hamlets, the modes and availability of transport and the time it took for me to travel there. That is why I could not visit some of the hamlets I wanted to visit initially. Also, in the middle of my fieldwork, there was also a threat of an elephant that came up, which put restrictions on my plans to travel long distances to the hamlets, and I had to wind up my interviews.

I had to avoid the intervention of NGO volunteers during my interaction with the respondents, especially when they asked me to speed up or to wind up the conversations quickly because of their own understanding of a 'research interview' in the survey method. I had to painstakingly convince them that the approach is different here. This is how a third person could break the flow of conversation sometimes between me and the respondents in the field. At the same time, this third person was also helpful in making my interactions with the respondents easier especially since they could not speak Malayalam and I could not completely understand the tribal language.

Along with unstructured interviews, focus group discussions, case study methods and observation were also used as tools for the field study. The focus group discussion method was effective for the study, but there were some limitations to interacting with the respondents who spoke more during the focus group discussion. The case studies for the study were identified through the focus group discussion and snowball sampling method.

The pre-planned method of data collection was not really feasible for the study area because the respondents were not easily available in the hamlets. The distance from the hostel to the hamlets was quite far and it was difficult to travel early in the morning to the hamlets or stay late in the evening there even though this was the most feasible time to interact with the women as they would be available at their homes. This is why the interviews were carried out through informal conversations as the respondents were more comfortable talking that way than in a formal interview.

It was used more in my interactions with the Kurumba women as they opened up more with informal conversations, especially since they had not much interacted with outsiders to the tribal community. They were also hesitant to respond to the interviews because of the continuous interference from the government officials; their visits to the hamlets always affected the individual lives of the tribal people. Other reasons for the hesitation on the part of the respondents included their detachment from the mainstream society because of the marginalisation that they faced from the other social groups since the times of their ancestors. People from the other social groups (migrant settlers) in Attappady are one of the reasons for the current deprivation of the tribal people. Their feeling of loss was latently visible when I asked them about how they lost their land and livelihood to the Malayalis and Tamils. Their lack of awareness about tribal rights is another problem, apart from their lack of

literacy and formal education. Some of them had no television or radio in their homes. Newspapers were also not accessible to them, as I came to understand. The literacy programme did not give them an impetus to read because the teachers also did not show much interest in improving their literacy.

## **2.7 Sources of Data Collection**

The study used both primary and secondary data; the primary data was collected directly from the women of the tribal communities from selected regions of Attappady, Kerala. The study also collected basic information regarding the tribal people, their livelihoods, education, healthcare, and so on, from various government officials working in the region in different capacities. This was useful to understand how far these migrant officials know, understand and empathise with the life, culture and natural environment of the tribal people in Attappady. The secondary data was collected from different books, journals, magazines, periodicals, newspapers, unpublished theses and so on.

## **2.8 Feminist Standpoint Approaches**

The present research project applies feminist standpoint approaches in its research design. The same is discussed in detail in the following sections.

### **2.8.1. Insider/Outsider Framework**

As an outsider attempting to understand the lives of tribal women, there was an invisible wall between me, as the researcher, and the respondents, which was forged by the identities of the two parties, the location of the two parties and the lifestyle that the tribal women represented which was entirely different from the mainstream ways of living in the state. As it remained so, I was constantly asked

about the purpose of conducting my research on their lives, and what I was hoping to gain from the whole process. I have also been ruminating on these questions throughout the duration of my study.

My outsider perspective guided the objectives of the study and my questions in the field, and so I was careful to enter their space and go about asking these questions only with their consent. At some level, my position as an outsider acted as a barrier for me to accessing the tribal villages. In the initial stages, this was worsened by the presence of the ST promoters, as the tribal communities did not want to open up about their issues in front of them. Even when employing a welfare policy approach to studying certain problems, I was beginning to feel empathetic with the women who had almost no access to certain basic resources. For instance, I was surprised to learn that water shortage was such an acute crisis in these communities, or for that matter, education, which is seen as a necessary tool for a better life from the perspective of an outsider, was responsible for the loss of much of the traditional knowledge in the tribal communities among the younger generations.

### **2.8.2. Feminist Standpoint Perspective**

Harding (2004) argues that starting research from the reality of women's lives, preferably of those women who are also oppressed by race and class will lead to a more objective account of social reality. In a way, it empowers oppressed groups by placing value on their experiences and leads the way towards developing an "oppositional consciousness" (Collins 1989). To understand how the living conditions of the tribal women have changed, one needs to look at the same with respect to the tribal women's position in the family and the tribal community as well. Only such a perspective would give an insight into the intergenerational tribal oppression through

the dimension of land expropriation, and not just the top-down approach to tribal sustainability. Further, any discussion on the matter will be incomplete without addressing the male dominance in land and property rights among the tribal communities.

The respondents told me, “As per the government records, the state spent twenty lakh rupees per person for each tribal household in Attappady through welfare programmes. But, where is it visible in our lives then? We are still struggling to meet both ends every month; at this point, the government is lying to the world about our ‘development’, because this ‘development’ is visible only on paper and not in our living conditions.”

## **2.9 Review of Literature**

The tribal communities in Attappady have been undergoing livelihood transformation since Independence. These livelihood changes adversely affected their occupation, income, education and health, especially for the tribal women. Women are the worst-affected victims of livelihood transformation in Attappady. The unequal distribution of resources, land dispossession, climate change, forest regulations, lack of food security and jobs, low socio-economic conditions, and health issues are the major problems affecting the tribal women. In this section, I discuss the books and articles related to the tribal communities in Kerala. They are divided under three headings- livelihood and occupation, education, and health.

### **2.9.1. Livelihood and Occupation**

P.R.G. Mathur’s *Tribal situation in Kerala* (1977) draws a picture of the socio-economic conditions of the tribal people in Kerala. The book examines the various

livelihood resources and patterns of tribal communities in Kerala which include the Cholanaikas, Kurumbas, Irulas, Adiyas, and Paniyas. The book notes the bonded labour system that existed among the tribal people in Kerala, their indebtedness, land appropriation and the multiple forms of exploitation they suffer at the hands of people from other social groups. The author states that the infrastructural developments during the late '70s and '80s affected the agriculture and forest economy of the tribal people. The book also notes the inferior status of tribal women in socio-political affairs, property rights and educational rights. The study illustrates the geographical isolation of the tribal communities due to their lack of access to infrastructural facilities and formal school education.

The historical explorations of the book are relevant here to understand how far the tribal people in Kerala have come up and transformed their socio-economic conditions. It is understood that there is a huge shift occurring in the living conditions of the tribal people, especially in agriculture and their dependence on forest resources. As per the livelihood analysis, the living conditions of the tribal people in Kerala have worsened over the many decades, and they are still struggling to sustain their livelihoods.

M. Kunhaman, in "The Tribal Economy of Kerala an Intra-Regional Approach" (1995), notes the transformation of tribal agriculture in Kerala. He observes that there was a shift from slash and burn (shifting cultivation) cultivation to settled cultivation, increasing the cases of bonded labour. Migration from Travancore was the basic reason for this change, especially in Malabar (North Kerala). These migrant settlers occupied the tribal lands and turned the tribal people into wage labourers in their own lands. The author states that, due to this land expropriation, the



majority of tribal people in Kerala have become landless and it has the highest incidence in Attappady.

According to the paper, it is understood that the market economy and indebtedness are the major reasons for the tribal people to engage in wage labour. It was helpful to understand the historical context of the millet crop cultivation in Attappady. During my study, it was found that millet crop cultivation was being practised less in Attappady these days.

Arun L.K. Jayasankar B. and B. Kurian Mathew Abraham, in “Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihood Issues of Tribesfolk: A Case Study of Periyar Tiger Reserve” (2001), observe the livelihood changes of the fishing tribal communities through biodiversity conservation. The paper states that fishing was the major source of income for them. As they lived in the forest and there were fewer opportunities to access any alternative income, restrictions in fishing adversely affected their income. Lack of education was another hindrance for them in getting other skilled jobs. The paper illustrates the conflict between the survival needs of the tribal people and the measures for nature conservation introduced by the state.

I posit that the need for biodiversity conservation will always affect the living conditions of tribal people in the forest. In the paper, the authors note that some of the tribal people have not even grasped that their habitat was a tiger reserve now; for them, their forest was everything.

Suresh K.R., in his paper “From Subsistence Agriculture to Wage Labour: Tribal Socio-Economic Transformation” (2001), says that the emergence of new settlements of people from other social groups was the main cause behind the destruction of the natural resources of the tribal community in Attappady. This was

observed in the transformation of their agrarian practices from shifting cultivation to settled cultivation. The paper argues that being monetised by the influence of other social groups people in Attappady, the tribal communities tended to engage more with wage labour. The newly introduced settled cultivation did not give them adequate income and they were deprived of food sustainability due to land appropriation that affected their shifting cultivation and the loss of soil fertility due to settled cultivation. The paper discusses the complete inaccessibility of food, water, sanitation, education and employment for the tribal people facilitated by the other social groups as well as the ITPD in Kerala.

The historical context of this paper about the shifting cultivation practices of tribal communities is relevant for my study, as I could trace back their oppression from the British period. When looking at the agricultural transformation of the Kurumbas, the forest-dwelling tribal group, I could observe in the field that they were affected by the introduction of settled cultivation, but the paper mentioned that the Kurumbas were not much affected by it. The article also does not look into the multiple forms of livelihood fluctuations and the variations in livelihood transformations through forest degradation, the changing vegetation in Attappady and the related movements, or the eco-restoration projects which no longer give importance to the ecosystems of the tribal people in Attappady and so on.

Bhaskaran, in *Mother Forest: the Unfinished Story of C.K. Janu* (2004), narrates the life story of the tribal activist C.K. Janu. The book discusses the labour question, local politics and tribal welfare issues. It is the story of how tribal people's habitats were destroyed in the name of land reformation and development, as they depended on the forest as a means of subsistence. The book lays out how the tribal communities of Wayanad, especially the Adiya and Paniya tribal groups, were

suppressed during different periods by the landlords to appropriate their land and also utilise the government welfare schemes meant for the tribal communities. In the book, C.K. Janu says that, before the migrants, they used to work for the *janmis* as they owned their land. When the migrants came, they took away their lands and men. Between the *janmis* and migrants, the Communist Party used their agitations against the landlords as a tool, and them, as a vote bank. She says that in the forest, they haven't known hunger, but they were displaced from these forests later and transplanted into colonies built by the government. They started to depend on ration shops, had to wait in long queues to get water from the public water connection and the children became ignorant about the forests and their culture and dropped out of school. They became menial workers in the towns and other places when they lost their land, livelihood and ecosystem. It transformed their belief system, family relations and freedom of movement and they became indebted to local shop owners. The people who depended on the forests and natural resources as a means of subsistence started to depend on hospitals for healthcare. The book portrays how the lives of the tribal people were suppressed in different periods which ended with the formation of welfare policies that exhibited the tribal culture and life objectifying them as victims and dependents on the welfare state, which experimented with and exploited the ecosystem and identities of these communities. C.K. Janu clearly points out how the educational policies made their children unaware of their culture with inputs taken only from the conventional education system provided by the mainstream government.

The book is a useful source of information for my study as it gives insights into eco-feminism from a tribal woman's perspective, which is more connected to nature as their means of subsistence. C.K. Janu discusses how the political party used

them as a tool to fight against the landlords during the land rights movement, pushing the land struggle of tribal communities under the carpet. The state government that had been changing every five years (up until 2020) in Kerala did not address the exact issues that the tribal communities were facing here. As per the findings of the field study, year after year, the tribal communities become more deprived and the tribal women are more affected by it due to the multiple encroachments into their living systems such as land expropriation, displacement imposed occupational transformation, mainstream formal education system, and so on.

Sumi Krishna, in her book *Livelihood and Gender: Equity in Community Resource Management* (2004), highlights gender issues in the context of rural livelihoods. It is observed that the shift from millet crops to cash crops including hybrid rice varieties and vegetables affected the livelihood of rural women. It is especially pronounced in the areas of livestock rearing, food security, watershed management and land utilisation. The book argues that women's decision-making power in tribal households has changed due to these changing agricultural patterns. Therefore, the tribal women went from being cultivators to labourers. However, finding any unskilled labour jobs was still better for them as, due to the remoteness in their villages, the lack of opportunities would otherwise force them to sit at home and do only household chores. The text highlights the failures of the development programmes for women including the employment guarantee schemes, self-help groups, watershed development and wasteland cultivation. These programmes place more workload on women than on men.

The study shows how health, hygiene, and water problems were addressed through welfare programmes. During my field study, I could see that such welfare programmes have not been implemented by the policymakers in Attappady though

they address some of the basic problems that the tribal women faced there. There are tribal women who still struggle to find water for drinking and other needs. It is observed that the women were unable to participate in economic activities due to their weak health conditions. So, the women faced difficulty in finding any source of income, and it contributed to their low status in their households.

Nitya Rao, in her paper "Gender Equality, Land Rights and Household Food Security: Discussion of Rice Farming System" (2005), discusses how rural women are the most affected by food insecurity since they were dependent in the paper on their own agrarian sector. It mainly focused on rural women, arguing for the importance of land rights for women for their food security. The paper observes that women's utilisation of land resources is unacknowledged even though the women have land rights, affecting the perception of the women's role in agriculture as a producer.

Occupational changes affect the tribal communities' sustainability, especially for women. With these agricultural changes, the women need to go out of their hamlets in search of wage labour. For tribal women living in remote villages, it is difficult to access any informal sector labour so the women are restricted to household chores. The paper is relevant to my study to understand the land rights of tribal women. The findings of the paper support my arguments about how tribal women are deprived of agriculture because they cannot inherit their parental land or their deceased husband's land.

Deepak K. Mishra, in his article "Gender, Forest and Livelihoods: A Note on the Political Economy of Transition in North-East India" (2007), analyses livelihood changes in the north-eastern states of India over the past half-century. The author notes that its impact has affected tribal men and women in different ways, especially

the economic activities of women. The restrictions on their access to livelihood resources also affect the food security and health of women. It also pointed out that the north-eastern states' tribal people enjoy more rights on forest resources, but it varies across households according to their financial stability. Through resource allocation policies based on gender, women lose their access to collect market produce like timber, bamboo, and medicinal plants because these are only accessible to men. Women are allocated only household resources such as fuel, fodder and food. The author points out that such gender disparity upturns the notion of tribal women enjoying a good status in their community since the women from some patrilineal communities do not have property rights over there.

My study also found that the changes in shifting cultivation and the restrictions on the utilisation of forest resources affected the respondents. The state restricts women's access here. So, in a way, the implementation of livelihood programmes for the tribal women in Attappady eventually stopped them from utilising forest resources. It is observed that there is not much encouragement from the forest officials and ITDP to utilise minor forest produce to ensure the financial stability of the tribal communities in Attappady. These barriers lead to decreased opportunities for the tribal women, who, in turn, spend more time in household activities.

Maithreyi Krishnaraj, in her book *Gender, Food Security and Rural Livelihoods* (2007), talks about the food insecurity of rural women and its multiple dimensions. The author observes that, due to less agriculture production and income, the women do not have purchasing power over land, which affects their food production. There is a vast decrease in food crop production in the Indian villages; neither the poverty reduction programmes nor the Public Distribution System could

do anything to overcome it. An 'effective livelihood' is a mix of proper income-generating activities and adequate agriculture for the tribal people, but these two are not supported by the State. The emergence of new forms of agriculture equipment made the agrarian sectors more male-centric, while the women were relegated to doing household work. In such a situation, the NREGA was the only option left for them. Water issues and food shortages in the households are all taken care of by the women. Over time, these activities adversely affect their health and food intake.

The book helped in understanding how gender inequality affects rural women. It was helpful to form the questions for my field study. I disagree with the author on the point that the size of the family matters for food security. During the field study, I observed that there were many families with only the wife and husband who experienced the same amount of food insecurity as families having more members. Food security means the ability to buy not only a sufficient amount of PDS rice, but also the right quantity of vegetables, grains, meat and fish, and these are no longer available to the tribal women in Attappady.

Rekha M. Shangpilang's, "Forest Legislation and Livelihood Strategies: Khasi Women in Rural Meghalaya"(2012), discusses the status of Khasi women in their matrilineal society. The tribal women in Khasi tribal community enjoy respect in terms of their motherhood and rights on land and forest. The paper, however, concludes that the women are not in a position to make decisions about the household and cultivation, even though they enjoy land and property inheritance rights. The paper states that the women's role in the economy is always considered secondary, in their households. They are always considered as doing less physical work compared to men. The notion is that household work and the collection of fuel, fodder, water and food grains from the forest are the tribal women's responsibilities.

The article is relevant to my research to understand how gender roles are placed in tribal communities. According to my study, the tribal women were the central income earners for their households since their husbands were not as responsible. There were some similarities in both the studies regarding the women's work burden and their struggle for subsistence relying on the forest.

Dev Nathan and Virginius Xaxa, in *Social Exclusion and Adverse Inclusion: Development and Deprivation of Adivasis in India* (2012), discuss the multiple forms of exclusion affecting various tribal communities in India on account of the development programmes. It highlights that land eviction and the denial of resources are the crucial issues that the tribal people are facing. Their ecosystem comprising shelter, food, medicine and livelihood is seriously affected. This book points out that those situations of the tribal people have remained the same till now even though there have been attempts made for their rehabilitation. It is a violation of human rights because these development projects, including dams for irrigation, hydroelectric stations, industrial complexes, mining projects etc. are provided more for other social communities than the tribal people, who remain deprived of their access to natural resources for their subsistence. The author also discusses the discrimination of women in Naga groups through the status of the women in education, health, livelihood, and decision-making, as well as the transformation of shifting cultivation in northeast India. He observes that, by moving from shifting cultivation to settled cultivation through government intervention, the availability of forest land and the livelihood security of the tribal people are seriously affected. The book also focuses on tribal land abduction for dams, mines and industries. It can be understood that women are more affected by exclusion and displacement in this manner. The book does not focus much on the effect of land encroachment and displacement on the tribal women.



While development programmes affect the ecosystems of tribal communities, the tribal women are the worst affected because they primarily perform household chores and it would become difficult for them to collect food, and find livelihood through forest allied resources and food production when their lands are abducted and displaced.

Indra Munshi, in her book *The Adivasi Question: Issues of Land, Forest and Livelihood* (2012), states that women suffer the most from the depletion of forests. The book points out how the tribal people of Tamil Nadu were evicted from their land by settlers from other social groups and the state and how huge livelihood changes occurred due to the land expropriation. The book analyses how the degradation of forests affected the traditional economy of the Birhors in Jharkhand. There was a transition in their livelihood activities such as rope-making, etc. to agricultural labour. The book observes the instability of their economic activities due to forest degradation, and some uncertainty visible in the livelihoods available to them. The book observes how the Onges of Andaman and Nicobar were forced to live in the inner parts of the forest due to governmental intervention in the form of development programmes. Therefore, they lost their sources of food, culture and autonomy in their own place. The book also states that the dislocation of livelihood was not only affecting their living conditions, but also the balance of the surrounding habitat.

The book talks in some detail about how tribal people undergo different forms of exploitation in India. It was useful for me to understand the discourse of livelihood transformations of tribal people from a multidimensional perspective. The implications of policy interventions for tribal people were visible throughout the book. The book discusses the complete denial of forest rights to the tribal people by

the state. The book, however, has not dealt more with how these changes affect tribal women, just like the previous one.

Ramdas Rupavath, in *Democracy, Development and Tribes in the Age of Globalised India Reality and Rhetor* (2015), highlights the multiple forms of livelihood deprivation through development programmes and the displacement of tribal communities. The author discusses displacement and rehabilitation due to mining, development projects and land eviction. The book analyses how displacement and livelihood changes affect the education of tribal people. It also criticises the absence of tribal languages in the school curriculum for tribal students. The author highlights how multilingual texts would be useful for the tribal children to learn their culture and tradition. Following that, the book highlights the status of the Lambada tribal women in their community. It is observed that women are in the least powerful position when it comes to the decision-making process in their households. This is observed through the decisions made around agriculture, land and property rights, education, housing and food production.

Tribal communities lose their land, livestock, and access to the forest, food security, and education for children through displacement and land expropriation. While they migrate in this situation in search of unskilled labour, it still affects their children's education, and it leads to child labour. In such situations, the lack of access to formal education will affect their future chances of finding any occupation, leaving them to struggle to find any sustainable livelihood. Distanced from agricultural production, the tribal people need to buy food grains from shops and this leads to their indebtedness. This book thoughtfully analyses the multiple dimensions of tribal oppression.

Arun Kumar Ghosh, in “Gender Gap in Literacy and Education among the Scheduled Tribal People in Jharkhand and West Bengal ” (2015), specifically points out the inequality in access to water for tribal communities in Jharkhand. The study shows how tribal people are not able to access natural resources anymore. The paper discusses the role of women in utilising natural resources in comparison to men because women are more associated with nature. The major reason behind this perception is that society itself perceives these jobs as not needing much effort mentally and physically, so women can easily do the same.

This article talks about women as the primary users of the forest in terms of collecting fodder, fuel, grazing of animals, and collecting other minor forest produce for income. During the study, the researcher concluded that the women are no longer depending on forests as much. The official restriction to enter forests is one of the reasons for that, so they do not keep goats or cattle as they cannot graze them. The paper argues that the tribal women enjoy more freedom than their men in socio-economic activities, but according to my field study, the women are forced to take up the household as well as financial responsibilities. It is visible, especially in the case of collecting firewood and water because these two are considered the tribal women’s major responsibilities.

Bina Agarwal, in the book *Gender Challenges Volume 1: Agriculture, Technology and Food Security* (2016), discusses women's participation in agriculture in different countries of the world. The book discusses the inequality in land rights, agriculture participation, income allocation and food security of rural women. The book highlights rural women’s segregation through agricultural modernisation, majorly affecting their socio-economic conditions. There is a class difference in these economic conditions because women who have less financial stability are affected

more than the women who belong to households which have more agriculture and land. There is a gender division in the tasks allocated in the agriculture sector; men have the primary control over agriculture and women are given the tasks of weeding, harvesting and threshing. This again marginalises women: in small-scale agriculture, the women in the households need to be a part of family cultivation and in large-scale agriculture, the women in the households are marginalised because these tasks are assigned to agriculture labourers. In both scenarios, women from both households are excluded from controlling cultivation and do not have access to income from agriculture, so, women and children from poor households are affected by a higher incidence of poverty, especially in food consumption and health. Moreover, in the case of the marginal households, there are variations in food security according to the season.

As per the findings of my study, tribal women are the worst affected by the changing agriculture pattern than any other social group in terms of food security and income. Gender discrimination in tribal agriculture is not addressed well by policymakers. Tribal communities themselves are more deprived by land allocation and livelihood changes, and among them, the tribal women become more vulnerable. The book was helpful for me to understand the gender dimensions of poverty, especially the vulnerable position of married women taking care of their children, and households and struggling to find food and income; while the men of their households control the land, household property and its utilisation, women become the marginal workers. The author points out that such situations adversely affect rural women especially those who are women abandoned by their spouses during famines and the scarcity of food grains.

Nandini Sundar, in her book *The Scheduled Tribes and Their India: Politics, Identities, Policies and Work* (2016), draws attention to the decreasing number of cultivators among the tribal communities in India. In this edited book, the life narrative of C.K. Janu is retold. It particularly talks about the indigenous knowledge of land, forest, food and their overall ecosystem. The book also highlights the resistance of tribal women against their abuse in the hands of the feudal state and government officers in Madhya Pradesh. It also discusses the subjugation of tribal communities in their own land by the state in the name of wildlife protection, suppressing tribal communities' freedom to cultivate and their entry into the forest to protect the sanctuaries. The book traces tribal women's participation in social movements, strongly driven by their concern for their survival and forest dependence. The book also mentions the loss of shifting cultivation among tribal communities. The method they followed not only helped in their subsistence, but also in the rejuvenation of forest conservation. The ban on slash and burn cultivation is a biased approach from the policymakers marking it as a process of environmental degradation while promoting industrialisation and mining to extract minerals from the protected natural resources of the tribal groups; this results in the decline of self-sufficiency of the tribal communities and their displacement from their land.

The book discusses the continuous struggles by the tribal communities to retain their rights to the forest, land, cultivation and so on. While the tribal women work on par with their men, have free mobility inside the forests and even come out of their households and hamlets, they are still more marginalised than the women from other social groups. This is because they have to work more in terms of collecting firewood, food for the households, taking care of animals, their children, elderly members in the family, cultivating in the absence of their husbands, and on top

of all that, they are unable to hire any wage labourer to work in their farm due to their economic situation; all this point toward the gendered division of labour in their community. They also need to resist the continuous exploitation by the state and other social groups for their basic rights as women and human beings. The book was a helpful source for my research to realise that the tribal communities in India are a heterogeneous group; according to their living conditions and their place of living, there are similarities in the exploitation they have faced over the generations, though.

Kasi Eswarappa, in “Livelihood, Poverty and Development of Adivasis: Reflections from a Village in South India”(2017), observes how the Sugalis of Andhra Pradesh migrated to the cities due to the agricultural land degradation in their villages. It led to an acute shortage of food and the male folks migrated in large numbers leaving behind the women and the elderly in the villages. The women were more burdened because they are in charge of the family and its nurturing. They are compelled to find food as there is no source of income in the village. The author points out that, due to scarce land availability, they are unable to produce food grains by themselves. The author also observes that the NGOs functioning for the Sugalis also imposed their politics on the tribal community.

Climate change has adversely affected the tribal people for the past several years. Since the tribal communities reside in the forests or nearby areas, they are made more vulnerable to restrictions, which are also mediated by class and caste (other social groups are still exploiting natural resources while the tribal communities are not allowed to access natural resources for shelter, food and income). The argument about the role of NGOs in empowering tribal people has to be reassessed because many of the NGOs are an extension of these state interventions. They do not address the real problems faced by the tribal people. It can be seen that instead of addressing the real

livelihood problems of the tribal people, the NGOs implement projects which are not feasible for the tribal people. From my research also, I came to the same conclusion about the role of NGOs and government agencies functioning for tribal communities.

Rugmini Devi and Elizabeth Edison, in “Tribal Land Alienation, Agricultural Changes and Food Culture Transition in Attappady” (2019), observe the changing livelihood patterns of Attappady through land alienation. The article throws light on the tribal relations with land as a means of paying tributes to their protectors and also for food. This is why the tribal communities do not keep boundaries on their land; they consider land as a community property so they do not have any title deeds. The paper points out that, in such cases, the migrant settlers take advantage to take over the tribal people’s land into their hands. There are three types of land invasion observed by the authors: invasion by force by the migrant settlers, invasion through debt repayment, and invasion through forest conservation policies. As a result of land expropriation, the tribal people started working as unskilled manual labourers instead of practising their traditional shifting cultivation. Along with that, the paper also draws attention to the changing food patterns of the tribal people caused by changes in shifting cultivation. From shifting cultivation to cash crop cultivation and unskilled wage labour, the authors observe the changing tribal culture in Attappady.

Some observations that my research area has put forward are also observed in the paper, especially with regard to the reasons for the land dispossession of the tribal people in Attappady. The paper supports the analysis of my research on the aspect of the loss of tribal lands. Other than land encroachment in tribal lands of Attappady, the paper has not addressed how tribal women are adversely affected by it. It has not addressed the role of the government in the changing tribal culture, as the state plays a huge role in the encroachment of tribal land. The government has not taken the land

dispossession of tribal people seriously and it still supports the demands of other social groups instead of the land issues of tribal communities in Attappady. Also, the paper has not elaborated on the multiple dimensions of the changing food habits of the tribal communities in Attappady.

### **2.9.2. Education**

Buddhadeb Chaudhuri, in his book *Education and Literacy programmes in India* (1992), observes that attaining formal school education is difficult for the Lepchas of Darjeeling because of language barriers. The book observes that the tribal schools in the Nilgiri District of Tamil Nadu do not provide adequate teaching support for the students. The author notes that the major reason for school dropouts was the exclusion of the tribal community from the curriculum. The text analyses tribal education in Kerala through the tribal residential schools in Wayanad. While education is free for the children, there is a poor implementation of policy in the tribal areas of Kerala. Lack of schools near their village, teachers, language barriers, lack of awareness of the benefits of attaining education among the parents and so on are some of the reasons the book cites for the low educational status of the tribal people in India.

A dominant notion about the tribal communities in India is that they are homogenous. Thus, the education and literacy of tribal people are also considered to be homogeneous. The policymakers and other social groups only provide infrastructure, free tuition, stationery, and clothes but do not worry about the teaching process. Many arguments are emerging about the school curriculum for tribal children, majorly about the location of the schools in the tribal areas. The tribal people face the crisis of modernity and indignity due to the imposition of development



programmes and the preservation of tribal culture. So, there must be a mix of the tribal livelihood skills and the skills to attain 'mainstream' occupations. A major drawback in the tribal residential school system is that the tribal children have no opportunity to interact with children from other social groups. From my study, I could see that they faced difficulty in mingling with other social group students when they went for undergraduate courses. This dissuades them from attaining formal education. The book argues that the tribal communities of Odisha have not shown any interest in formal school education because their priority is their livelihood. I disagree with this statement because without motivation and awareness about education, this interest cannot be cultivated. In addition to that, the basic necessity for the tribal communities is subsistence, which reinforces my earlier argument for integrating tribal knowledge systems with mainstream education.

Dana Dunn, in the article "Gender Inequality in Education and Employment in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribal people of India" (1993), states that the women in these social groups are more underprivileged in education. The patriarchal nature of Indian society has made their existence more deplorable. There is a gap between the literacy rates of women and men with a lesser number of women enrolling on higher education. This reduces their chances of employment. Therefore, the paper says, opportunities are generally limited to low-income wage labour and agricultural activities for women of these two social groups. In this manner, the emerging changes in the agricultural sector such as mechanisation and privatisation intensely affect their socio-economic conditions. The paper refers to the scheduled caste and tribal women as the 'double minority' because of the gender disparity they face from their own social group and from mainstream India. Therefore, the author notes how important it is for them to gain economic security in such a situation. As

per the data available about the scheduled caste and tribe women, they contribute as highly as agricultural labourers, and on par with men are as cultivators. Their economic instability is mainly attributed to the lesser land holdings of these women.

According to the gendered division of labour in the agriculture sector in India, men are considered to be the cultivators and women, the labourers. There is a gender disparity in the employment patterns among the tribal people in Attappady as well. It is observed that when men go out for work, women are engaged only in NREGA work or are bound to their households in the absence of it. Educational and cultural barriers are the reasons behind the non-participation of women outside their hamlets in the employment sector. It is also true that the educational qualifications of tribal men are lower compared to the marginal sections of non-tribal males in Attappady. So, then, it cannot be said that it is only the tribal women who are affected by the lack of access to education. Factors such as the responsibility of the daughters to take care of the family and help parents in agriculture also affect tribal women's education status. There was equality among the tribal communities in Attappady in terms of cultivation, which is the traditional economic activity for them. The development programmes, interventions and changing agricultural patterns are also causes for the low economic status of the tribal women here.

Arun Kumar Gosh, in the article "The Gender Gap in Literacy and Education among the Scheduled Tribal people in Jharkhand and West Bengal" (2007), points out that the gender gap in literacy and education is more intense among the tribal communities of Jharkhand. When the family has less productivity in agriculture, the girl children also work for wage employment to complement their income. The article observes that when the family income is low, it affects their ability to send their daughters to school. The article also observes that there is a high gender disparity

after the lower primary level school education. Taking care of siblings, the low economic condition of the family, lack of infrastructural facilities like toilets, the distance from home, the lack of female teachers, etc. are some of the reasons for the high rate of school dropouts of girl children that the author observes from the study.

Similar observations were made in my fieldwork as well, even though there are some points of disagreement I have wherein the lack of infrastructure does not contribute to the problem as much as the requirement of living away from the family. The cultural constraints, especially puberty, force tribal girls to drop their education. This is not a reflection of the lack of motivation on the part of the parents, because the male children are also not getting enough education, while the female children are not allowed to go to school altogether. When the family is struggling to meet their daily needs, it is difficult to send their children to school. In my study, I found that the children studying in ashram schools were also dropping out of their schools, so it cannot be said that residential school education would benefit tribal children more. More than the poor infrastructure, the children said that the lack of teaching support and proper care given to the children in hostels discouraged them from continuing with school.

Panda B.K., in his article “Education of Girls among Ethnic Tribal Groups in South Asia” (2011), presents his study on three Asian countries, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, and argues that the basic reason behind tribal people’s refusal to send their girl children to school is lack of residential schools. The paper discusses the language problems faced by the tribal people in following the school curriculum. Free education, scholarship and free textbooks cannot help in overcoming the educational backwardness of tribal communities. It criticises development programmes because

they are failing to reach the ethnic communities in a better way. The data shows that the literacy rate of tribal girls is comparatively less than that of tribal boys.

The paper refers to the general factors that affect tribal girls' education. It does not talk about policy implementation and how far it has reached when it comes to tribal education. Apart from the policymakers, the school authorities need to pay more attention to the children to prevent school dropouts. The attitude of teachers towards tribal children has to change. The text thoughtfully discusses how policymakers perceive education for tribal girls.

Seetha Kakkoth, in “Unheard Voices: A Study on the Perceptions of Tribal School Drop-outs in Kerala” (2012), illustrates the issues of school dropouts among the tribal children in Kerala. The study was conducted in two ashram schools in Kerala located in Palakkad and Malappuram districts. The study investigates the dropout rate of tribal children even as the schools provided food, accommodation, uniforms and basic amenities. It was found that children were hesitant to go back to school. By interviewing teachers and children who dropped out of school, multiple reasons were found by the author. The basic reason found was that the children were not happy to stay away from their parents and their hamlets. The lack of proper teaching aids and the attitude of teachers and staff from other social groups toward the tribal children are some of the other reasons that the author found in the study. It also states that the tribal girls drop out of school when they get married at a very early age. The paper also discusses the obstacles faced by tribal children in pursuing formal education after passing the 10<sup>th</sup> class, especially the problem of adapting to mingle with children from other social groups, especially those who studied in Model Residential Schools. The author criticises that, except for providing free education,

the state is not taking care of other expenses for the students to continue their education.

One can see that while the family is not imposing any restrictions on the tribal children, it is difficult for them to live in a residential hostel where the school authorities monitor every activity. Among the tribal communities, there is no restriction to interact with the opposite sex, but in the residential schools, they are not allowed to interact with each other except inside the classroom. The children need to be shown love and care at this age, which they do not get from the residential schools, so they are not interested in going to hostels. I found the same situation in my field, where there are many tribal children who dropped out of the schools in Attappady. It was found that many of the respondents left their schools after attaining primary level education.

Hima Bindu R., In “Quality of Education in Tribal Areas: A Case Study of Khammam District of Andhra Pradesh” (2014), observes that the low economic status of parents affects the education of tribal children, especially girl children. The paper also points out that the accessibility to schools, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor quality of teaching, medium of instruction, and unsuitable curricula affect the education of tribal people. Data for the study was collected from six residential schools and ten non-residential schools in the Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh. The study found that the children face difficulty in learning due to language problems.

Sending children away to boarding schools at the young age of six and above affects the well-being of children especially due to the absence of parents and other family members around them. From my study, I could see that the residential schools do not have a tribal-friendly environment, apart from suffering from poor

infrastructure and teaching facilities. And so, the tribal children drop out of school. Until the curriculum is based on the tribal habitat, culture and ecosystem, it will not be an inclusive education.

T. Brahmanandam and T. Bosu Babu, in their paper “Educational Status among Scheduled Tribes: Issues and Challenges” (2016), observe the problems that the tribal communities have had to face to get education in post-Independent India. The female enrolment ratio is less compared to that of males in tribal communities. The major reason pointed out for this is the economic instability in tribal households. Because of their poor economic conditions, the tribal people need to concentrate on subsistence, so the girl children will have to work along with their parents in the agricultural field, cattle rearing, collecting fuel and taking care of younger siblings. The author observed the literacy gap between the scheduled tribe people and other social groups in the paper. The Ashram schools and tribal hostels that were implemented to compensate for the disparity in tribal education have not achieved their expected targets. The paper also addresses the failure of the National Policy of Education in introducing instruction through their mother tongue to the children. It is observed that the school dropout rates have remained high among tribal children and they are unable to get higher education.

The text is relevant to understanding the current scenario of tribal education in Kerala. There are school dropouts in my study area even though Ashram Schools and pre-metric tribal hostels are functioning. There are financial barriers to attaining their education even though education is free and compulsory. It is observed that school dropouts after the primary level are more in the case of tribal girls than boys; it shows the gender disparity within their community. The text discusses the lack of awareness and interest among the parents to send their children to school. My field study found

that the younger parents showed more interest in sending their children to school these days.

Ramdas Rupavath, in “Tribal Education: A Perspective from Below” (2016), examines the shortcomings in tribal education in India by referring to the tribal communities of the Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh. The paper examines the policies implemented for tribal education and criticises them for not being tribal-centric, as the mainstream society is conceptualising them. Such curricula do not emphasise tribal languages for learning and so it cannot be an inclusive education. The author refers to the heterogeneity in the socio-economic conditions of the tribal people in India, which the policymakers have not considered for the implementation of these programmes. There is still a wide gap in the literacy rates of tribal communities and other social groups due to this. The paper illustrates that there is a larger tendency for school dropouts among the tribal children studying far away from their villages. The author found in the study that the girl children were not attending schools in the village because their parents were not interested in sending them to school.

The paper also argues that when the parents are not educated, there is a higher tendency for them not to send their children to school. It is not only because of their lack of awareness about education, but it is also due to the limitations of their economic conditions. Most parents prefer their children to work in the agricultural fields because food is their primary concern. During my study, it was found that the tribal children who studied in MRS schools and pre-matric hostels were hesitant to go for further formal education due to the attitude of ‘otherness’ they received from students of other social groups.

### 2.9.3. Health

Sutapa Maiti, Sayeed Unisa and Praween K. Agarwal, in “Health Care and Health among Tribal Women in Jharkhand: A Situational Analysis”(2005), compare the prenatal and postnatal healthcare of tribal women with that of women of other social groups. The paper points out that the educational status of the tribal women and their husbands matters in their awareness of the healthcare system. The nutritional status of the tribal women was also observed to find the incidence of anaemia among them. It was found that the tribal women were more anaemic, which affects their reproductive health.

When compared to women of other social groups, tribal women live in remote and rural areas, and it is difficult for them to reach hospitals. Tribal women's education and economic independence are comparatively low due to their double oppression based on their caste and class positions, and so, approaching the healthcare system is not easy for them, especially in the postnatal period, or after childbirth. In analysing the health status of my respondents, I came across some of the issues of the healthcare system faced by the tribal women in Attappady, especially during childbirth. The tribal women are affected by anaemia and other health problems after delivery due to the lack of proper care. The article is relevant to my study from the perspective of the healthcare of tribal women, which still needs to be discussed more in the backdrop of the welfare programmes implemented for tribal people.

Dash P. Sharma, in *Anthropology of Primitive Tribes in India* (2006), illustrates the health status of the different tribal communities in India. Illiteracy, ignorance, low socio-economic conditions, lack of drinking water, poor sanitation and health education, alcoholism and a poor healthcare system are the major reasons for



the poor health of tribal people, as observed in the book. The book discussed the health status of the Saharias of Rajasthan. It states that, due to their deprived socio-economic condition, their accessibility to the healthcare system is quite miserable. Following that, the nutritional deficiency of the Paudi Bhuiyan tribal community of Odisha is discussed. The study found the incidence of under-nutrition in the women and children of the community.

Due to the shortage of food, women mainly skip their meals for their family members. According to the author, low income is a reason for the low health status of the tribal people. When it comes to my field site, along with low income, their transition into agriculture was another basic reason for this issue. The book discusses the superstitious beliefs of the tribal people in India. The health inequality of tribal people is made worse by the neglectful behaviour of the state towards their well-being. There is a notion that the tribal people are not utilising the healthcare system and that they are not going to FHCs and CHCs. More than cultural constraints, their accessibility to such healthcare facilities needs to be addressed. According to my findings, tribal people place more trust in modern medicine, but it is not easily accessible to them. Many of the ethno medicinal centres run by some of the tribal medical practitioners are turning ethno medicine into a business in Attappady. However, even these are not accessible to the tribal communities because they are aimed at the other social groups.

Sunitha Reddy, in her article "Health Status of Tribal Women and Children: An Interdisciplinary Approach" (2008), discusses the neglected health status of tribal women in India through development programmes. The paper observes that low nutritional intake and excessive work burden are the major problems affecting women. The study also found that tribal women are more affected by anaemia. Apart

from the lack of food, the work burden in the households affected their physical health, resulting in fatigue. There is not much of a healthcare system near their settlements, also a reason to not get adequate healthcare, especially during prenatal and postnatal periods. There are barriers for tribal women to access the healthcare system due to the poor functioning of the healthcare system for the tribal communities in India.

The article argues that, like the development programmes targeting tribal people, the planners have not given much attention to maternal and child healthcare. According to my study, in Attappady, the government has placed some emphasis on women and child healthcare. The way such systems approach tribal people, however, is not a scientific way. For example, it can be seen that, due to the high infant mortality rates, the health department admits mothers one month before their delivery, but after the delivery, they do not perform follow-up/check-ups, and more importantly, this is not a long-term solution for this issue. Deforestation, land dispossession, and even housing schemes increase women's work burden. In addition to that, lower food production has also affected their health.

M. Wan, C.J.P. Colfer and B. Powell, in "Forest, Women, and Health: Opportunities and Challenges for Conservation"(2011), discuss the health issues of forest-dwelling women in developing countries. The paper is based on field experiences from Africa, Latin America and Asia. It has been noted in the paper that the women living in forests have severe health problems due to their heavy workload. Women tend to work more compared to their men, and the majority of these works are hazardous to women, especially collecting and carrying fuelwood. The paper observes that deforestation has restricted their easy access to resources, and so they need to walk long distances to carry water and fuelwood and wander in search of wild

vegetables and fruits. The paper illustrates how the women of Nigeria walk kilometres in distance to collect water. Some health problems like uterine prolapse are caused by this heavy workload and are found among the women from Nepal in the study. The paper has also tried to illustrate the position of women in their households. Verbal abuse by husbands and mothers-in-law has been discussed in the study which they attribute to the women's health problems.

The paper is an attempt to understand women's inequality in health. There is a general lay people's notion that the tribal women enjoy equal social status as their men. From the paper, one can see how gender roles function. One of the major observations is that women's roles in economic activities are not encouraged. Women living in the forests are not benefited from economic activities; there would also be no place to sell forest products. So, their access to resources is also affected by their household activities, which was also observed at my field site.

Arima Mishra and Sumita Sarma, in "Understanding Health and Illness among Tribal Communities in Orissa"(2011), discuss the healthcare pattern among the tribal people in Odisha through secondary sources. Odisha reports a high infant mortality rate among its tribal communities due to the high incidence of under nutrition compared to overall Indian figures. The paper notes the approach of the public health professionals towards the rural tribal people. The paper notes the tribal community's beliefs in supernatural powers and healers, citing the same as a major reason why the tribal people do not depend much on the modern healthcare system.

The governments always stereotype the tribal people's health notions according to their beliefs held over decades. There are some recurring points that emerge in studies by scholars and policymakers such as their beliefs and customs,

unhygienic living conditions, unsafe drinking water, their lack of education, and accessibility to healthcare systems as the reasons for the low health status of the tribal people. They need to look into these issues more intensely and tackle them, but none of these issues is taken seriously by the policymakers to improve the tribe people's health and living conditions. The paper has not explored tribal women's health much, especially when they are the worst affected in the community when it comes to health problems.

Dipankar Chatterjee and P. Dash Sharma, in *Livelihood and Health Issues and Process in Rural Development* (2013), observe that the development initiatives to improve the socio-economic life of the Lodhas in a village in Paschim Medinipur district, West Bengal, have not led to much development for the Lodhas. The paper analyses multiple development programmes that were implemented here. Even though the community got land through NGOs, they were unable to cultivate it due to the lack of equipment and so the land remains fallow. This has caused a shortage of paddy for the families. Following that, the book discusses the livelihood diversification of the tribal people in West Bengal. One chapter notes the drawbacks of development programmes for the tribal people who occupy a lower economic status because of the lack of resources, land, skill training and marketing. Another chapter discusses the health status of the Kondh tribal community in Odisha. The chapter observes the perception of traditional healthcare practices among the tribal people and the emergence of the healthcare system by the government here. The book also discusses the nutritional health of the Bharia tribal community. The study reveals how that community has shifted from their self-sufficient shifting cultivation practices to settled cultivation and its impact on their health status. It criticises the negligence of the healthcare system set up by the government. The undernutrition of the tribal

people in West Bengal and the poor functioning of tribal hospitals are discussed in other chapters.

The healthcare system in India has thoroughly neglected the health profile of the tribal people. There is a notion that the tribal communities are not much interested in the modern healthcare system and that they are still following traditional healing practices. This has to be rectified when the health problems of the tribal communities have begun to increase in developing countries like India. In my study, major health problems such as malnutrition, anaemia, goitre, reproductive health problems and mental illnesses were found in the field. These affect the tribal communities in spite of the emergence of development programmes for the same. In the book, it is noted that the low socio-economic conditions, the lack of self-sufficiency, poor education, and the continued use of old equipment are some of the reasons for the health problems of the tribal people. Inequality in their access to the healthcare system also needs to be analysed. There are tribal communities with less accessibility to the healthcare system, even to basic healthcare assistance from the FHCs, compared to the people of other social groups.

T.K.Sundari Ravindran and Rakhal Gaitonde, in their book *Health Inequalities of India: A Synthesis of Recent Evidence* (2018), discuss how Dalit and Adivasi social groups are more affected by health inequality. The author says that due to their economic instability, the tribal children are less immunised. The text points out that, compared to the Scheduled Caste women, Scheduled Tribe women suffer more from maternal mortality. Continuous pregnancies without intervals for recuperation, hazardous work and the lack of nutritious food are some of the reasons identified by the book for this problem. The use of Self-Help Groups in such situations to improve the health condition of women in these social groups is also discussed in the book.

The book notes that there is a marginalisation in the consumption of nutritious food due to caste-based inequality. It is derived from caste-based occupations and, in turn, caste-based inequality in accessing resources. The lack of availability of healthcare services is also addressed in the book.

From the book, one can understand that access to resources is important for improving the health status of tribal women. The inequality in income has also affected their accessibility to the healthcare system. In my field, even though there is a Government Tribal Specialty Hospital, the community members still struggle to get good health services. There are situations when the tribal people have had to go to medical colleges in neighbouring districts and even Tamil Nadu during emergency cases. The high incidence of sickle cell anaemia among the tribal women is another health problem that I found in the field site caused by the unequal distribution of access to resources.

## **2.10 Research Gap**

Research studies generally take a holistic approach to understand the livelihood issues of tribal communities. There are not enough studies about how the livelihood changes caused by development programmes have affected tribal women. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to analyse the reception, resistance and resentment of tribal women towards the development programmes implemented for them.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Irulas, Kurumbas and Mudugas of Attappady**

#### **Introduction**

Attappady is one of the largest tribal settlements in Kerala. It is located in the Mannarkkad Taluk of Palakkad district in Kerala bordering Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu and was a part of Malabar district under the Madras presidency before the formation of Kerala state in 1956. Attappady is a land of hills and valleys and is situated between two ranges of the Western Ghats and slopes towards the northeast. Descending from the corner of the Nilgiris, this narrow region runs due south to an elevation of 550 metres at Mukali. Attappady is a part of the famous Nilgiri International Biosphere Reserve, relatively near the hotspot, Silent Valley. The Attappady Block area comprises 745 sq. km and is divided into three panchayats namely Agali, Pudur and Sholayur. The region has been divided into two ecological regions as Western and Eastern Attappady. The average rainfall of eastern and western Attappady is 839 mm and 2084 mm per annum respectively. Thus, it is an area comprising dry land and rain-fed regions respectively.

Attappady is the only tribal block panchayat in Kerala formed in the year 1962. There are three tribal communities belonging to the Attappady valley distributed across the three panchayats of Agali, Pudur and Sholayur, namely the Irulas, Mudugas and Kurumbas. Among the three, the Irulas comprise the largest population and inhabit the plains and low altitude areas of Attappady. Mudugas are the second largest community in Attappady, while Kurumbas are concentrated in the higher altitudes of the Western Ghats and are the least in number. The Kurumbas belong to one among the five Particularly Vulnerable Tribal communities (PVTG)

identified in Kerala along with the Cholanaikan, Kadar, Kattunayakan, and Koraga communities. Consequently, in terms of their economic well-being also, the Kurumbas are the most deprived among the three tribal communities.

There are 192 tribal hamlets in Attappady and these hamlets are locally referred to as *Ooru*. The tribal economy in Attappady is based on traditional agriculture, minimum surplus allocation and general reciprocity within the group. Land, especially forests, comprises an important natural resource for the tribal people and the tribal community uses it for divergent purposes ranging from shifting cultivation to sedentary agriculture. The forest is not only a source of food, fuel and fodder for the tribal communities, but also an integral part of the culture (Development report 2003, AHADS). The emerging towns of Attappady are Mukkali, Thavalam, Goolikadavu, Agali, Kottathara, Kalkandi, and Jellippara.

Major government institutions such as the Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) office, Attappady Hill Area Development Society (AHADS), Attappady Block Panchayat office, Kudumbasree project office, Government Tribal Specialty Hospital (only one Government Tribal Specialty Hospital in Kerala) and the KILA (Kerala Institute of Local Administration) function at the centre of Agali panchayat. The tribal communities of Attappady need to be connected with these offices regularly to avail government assistance in housing, financial assistance, healthcare, and livelihood programmes.

### **3.1 Tribal Hamlets and Distribution of Population**

There are similarities in the structure of hamlets for the three tribal communities. The hamlet land belongs to the whole community, so anyone belonging to the hamlet has the right to build their house there. The people of these tribal



communities live in small huts constructed with bamboo, clay and grasses collected from the forest. The huts are supported by bamboo splinters and thatched with forest grass. They have small doors and low ceilings, as they are designed to withstand the onslaught of adverse climatic conditions and strong winds. The floors are plastered with cow dung, clay and soil. These huts ordinarily contain two small rooms, the backroom (*ullara*) which is used as the kitchen and the front room (*vettara*) which is for the storage of agricultural products and is even used as the place of worship of the family deities. Besides these, there is also an adjoining veranda in front of each hut, known as *dinne*. These days, these huts are replaced by houses built with different welfare schemes, that consist of one bedroom, a hall, and a kitchen, and few houses even have toilets.

According to the Census Report 2011, there are 26,521 Irulas distributed across 149 hamlets in Attappady. Each hamlet has 20 to 180 houses. The Mudugas live mainly in the forest areas of the south-western foothills and the southern part of the valley. They are distributed across 24 hamlets of the Agali and Pudur panchayats, the population strength being 3497 in each one of them. The Kurumbas live in 19 hamlets in the inner parts of the Attappady forest range. These hamlets are isolated from one another and are surrounded by their *panchakkadu*(farmland) and forest lands. The 2251 members of the tribal population are distributed across 10 to 250 households in each hamlet. In each hamlet, there are ten to sixty households. Basically, the households in these hamlets are linked by kinship (Tharakan 2012). The tribal hamlets are referred to as *Ooru* and the huts as *kure*.

In earlier times these hamlets were isolated from one another, while the tribal hamlets were surrounded by the settlements of other social groups. The difference in the houses of Kurumbas from the other two tribal communities is that they are still

near their farmland, which is why it is observed that Kurumbas are practising agriculture more than the other two tribal communities.

There is a similarity in the three tribal communities' hamlet councils. In each tribal hamlet in Attappady, there is a council to maintain the law and order in the community and also to take care of the people in the hamlet. The council includes the *Ooru Mooppan*, who is the decision-making authority of every affair in the hamlets including land and agriculture. *Ooru Mooppan*, the headman or the chief of the tribe, is the man who decides on the common issues affecting the hamlet. He is the connecting link between the outside world and the families, especially between the Government and the tribal community. Nowadays, due to the intervention of the government, the role of the *Ooru Mooppanis* confined only to cultural practices. There was a time when whoever came to visit the hamlet had to visit the *Ooru Mooppanto* to get his permission to enter the hamlet and interact with the people. His permission and presence on each and every occasion and decision making were very important for the community. The Scheduled Tribal Promoters enjoy a higher position than the *Ooru Mooppan* now, the government's intervention being the major reason for this change.

Following him is *Mannukkaran*, the priest of the soil who supervises the agricultural activities of the settlement or hamlet, and the beginning of cultivation every year. He is the priest for the rituals related to shifting cultivation. The *Mannukkaran* would be the first person to sow seeds and commence the agricultural season every year. He would sow seeds in his *panchakkadu* (farmland) early in the morning, as they follow the custom that no one should see it when he sows seeds. Tribal communities called their farmland *panchakkadu*. It is because agriculture is a mix of five or more crops. Later, the rest of the households will begin sowing on their

land. When shifting cultivation was replaced by cash crop cultivation, the importance of *Mannukkaran* was also reduced. This is an excellent example of the socio-cultural institutional arrangements in tribal communities and their expertise in governing not only the tribal settlement but also its natural resource base. A tribal council under the control of the *Ooru Mooppan* ensures a sustainable ecological balance and subsistence tribal economy based on a sound human–nature relationship or ecological centric approach.

Following him, other council members include the *Vandari or bandari*, the treasurer; a *Karutalai*, who is the junior headman; and, *Jathikkaran*, another headman of the settlement (Kalathil 2004, Velluva 2006 and Poyil 2009). It is observed that only men become the members of the hamlet council members. In any case, if these members have no male children, the male child of their siblings will become the council member. These days, apart from that, the Scheduled Tribe (ST) promoter is more important for the hamlet than the hamlet council's members, as the government gives more importance to the ST promoters. It was visible in the hamlets during the fieldwork that the ST promoters were more influential in the community, especially in education, marriage, childbirth, house construction and so on, and even gave permission for people to enter the village, over and above the *Ooru Mooppan*.

### **3.2 Customs and Culture**

The tribal communities have their own gods and goddesses, and beliefs surrounding the Malleswaran peak (the highest peak in Attappady). They believe in Malleswara as their god and have a temple called the Malleswara temple. The intervention of other social groups affected their beliefs and they started to assimilate into Hinduism, and later, to other religions. The section below tries to bring some of

the major rituals among the three tribes as per their cultural practices in Attappady.

Most of the rituals now have come from their interaction with Hindu communities, as the earlier tribal communities followed their own belief systems earlier.

### **3.2.1. Puberty**

The tribes of Attappady give more importance to puberty than childbirth.

When a girl attains puberty, her father has to report this news to the *Ooru*

*Mooppan* and the *Ooru Mooppan* informs the same to the girl's relatives and other members of the settlement. She has to live separately from her family for those seven days. The place she lives in during the days of 'pollution' is called *chala* which is made with bamboo and coconut leaves. Men are not permitted to enter *chala* on those days. During those days, her friends would be attending to her and it is their duty to make her happy by singing songs or telling jokes. No male member is allowed to see her nor is she allowed to see any male member during that period. During these seven days, the girl has to live alone. In the earlier days, the *chala* was constructed away from their *koorai* but now they started to arrange it near their concrete houses.

During this period of puberty, the girl is restricted from entering the main house or walking around the surroundings of the household. There would be separate utensils for her to eat food and drink water from. The girl would not take bath on these days. On the eighth day, her sister in law and friends will come with new clothes to bathe her in the neighbouring pond or river. This ceremony is done in the hamlets nowadays also. They would use the leaves of a tree as soap and oil for bathing. Before leaving for the bath, they will burn the *chala*. The clothes she used during the seven days will be left in the river. After bathing, she would wear a new dress and

ornaments. On the eighth day, there will be certain ceremonies and a feast in the girl's house.

The expenses of the feast are met either by the girl's parents or by the members of the settlement. The feast would be accompanied by dance and music. Thus, the tribes of Attappady give more importance to the puberty ceremony and the feast followed by it than others. The members of the hamlet will not take food or drink water offered by the family if, in case, the ceremony is not conducted within a year after her attaining puberty. It is found that tribal girls are hesitant to go to school after reaching puberty. Menstruation is still a taboo among the tribal communities in Attappady and women during the menstrual period are restricted from entering the house. But these days there are changes that women during that time can sleep in the house where no one can enter due to the facilities of the new forms of houses. The respondents informed that they cannot enter the household and kitchen for five days during menstruation and that they stay outside the house. There will be a separate plate and tumbler for them to use on those days. The respondents expressed their opinion against this custom during the interview.

### **3.2.2. Death**

The funeral is the most elaborate ceremony among the tribes in Attappady. It is structured over seven days. They follow it with singing and dancing a full day and night. These songs include the stories of legends in the past. There will be a second funeral ceremony following this after one to seven years. However, this ceremony is different for all three tribal groups. This ceremony is commonly called *cheru*. The tribes give importance to their ancestors on all the occasions in their life. Each hamlet has a burial ground which is very important to their hamlet. According to

the tribal beliefs, they will never let the hamlet move away from this burial ground. The death ceremony of the tribes varies according to their social system. The Irulas practice different customs from the Mudugas and Kurumbas. But, these days the three tribal communities follow a similar social system and have kins in each group since they allow intermarriage among them.

When an Irula man or woman dies, the news of the death is sent through an Irula male or a Kurumba to close relatives, who would immediately arrive on the scene to express their condolence. The burial of the deceased may even be delayed for two or three days to enable relatives living in distant places to attend the burial. A hut is immediately constructed where the corpse is laid, and the singing and dancing continue till the funeral process is over. The funeral process is completed when the soul of the deceased is believed to enter the shadow land. The burial consists of seven sticks tied like a cross on two long sticks. The son or any other person acting as the chief officiator has to shave his head. The headman, the senior nephew and the son have to participate in the funeral ceremonies. Among some groups, the corpse is propped up in a sitting position with the legs crossed and lowered into a circular grave. The dead man's wife places betel leaves in the mouth of the corpse. Some groups bury a few grains of rice and a lamp with the dead. The eldest son performs the funeral rites; the Kurumba who assists during the funeral rites is given a vessel used by the deceased. Three days after the burial, the second rite is performed. During this ceremony, the son of the deceased shaves off his hair. The Irulas observe death pollution for six months to one year. After this period, they conduct a purification ceremony.

Among the Mudugas, any death is considered to be the concern of the entire settlement and full honours are given to the departed soul by beating drums and

playing pipes. All the members of the settlement, including the headman, have to attend the death ceremonies. The corpse will be buried only on the 3rd day after death, and till that time, the members present there will sing and dance around the corpse, and only the close relatives will mourn. Before burying the corpse, they would not cook food in the hut. All the ceremonial rituals connected with death are performed under the overall supervision of the headman. The corpse is washed, dressed in new clothes and placed on a bed made of bamboo poles. Then, coins are placed in the mouth and on the forehead of the corpse. The sons-in-law and the brothers-in-law carry the corpse to the burial ground, where a rectangular pit to a depth of about five feet is dug. The eldest son throws three handfuls of grains into the pit and then the corpse is placed inside the pit. The corpse is never placed flat in the pit; it is placed in a sitting position with legs stretched to the front. The head faces upwards and towards the south. From the cloth of the corpse, three pieces are cut out by the son who places one on the middle and the other two on both ends of the body. He also throws three handfuls of grains and three handfuls of soil onto the corpse.

The weapons and utensils used by the deceased person are also put in the pit and the members who are present there cover the pit with soil. All the items brought along with the corpse are abandoned there. Before returning from the spot, the son of the deceased person cuts out a piece of Darbha grass, hits this on the tomb and he spells the name of the dead person. After taking a bath in the river, he returns to the hut accompanied by other family members, and he brings the piece of Darbha grass to the hut. Then, two vessels, one containing water and the other containing coconut oil, are placed before the son. He dips the piece of Darbha grass in the oil and holds it over the water by chanting the name of the deceased. This is repeated twice. When the two drops of oil and the water join together, they believe that their ancestors in heaven

have accepted the soul of the deceased person. If the first two drops do not join, they will repeat the process till they do. The members in the hut observe pollution for 40 days. Giving a feast to the members who took part in the death ceremonies dissipates the pollution. Generally, the Mudugas do not have any other ceremony by which the dead are remembered.

The Kurumbas bury their dead, usually on the third day after death. The chief mourner is the eldest son. However, if an unmarried boy or girl dies, then the chief mourner would be the cross-cousin of the opposite sex. The body is washed and covered in a new cloth and is kept on the veranda, usually inside a booth made of plantain stems. They dance along to funeral songs while playing the *thugi* (an indigenous drum). This is continued till the burial is complete. They have their own burial grounds near their hamlets. On the third day, the body is carried on a bamboo bier to the burial ground, where the grave is already made and is lowered into it with the head pointing in the north direction. With the burial, the pollution also comes to an end. Every fifth year or so, the Kurumbas perform death rites (*cheeru*) for their ancestors.

### **3.2.3. Marriage**

There are two kinds of marriages that can be seen among the tribes in Attappady, namely, marriage by choice, and arranged marriage. Girls are considered to have reached their marital age after hitting puberty. The age of marriage among girls is from 18 to 21 at present. However, in earlier times, marriage was conducted before reaching 18 years of age only but there are few marriages reported to have been conducted before the legal age in recent years also. Bride price is common among them. In the case of arranged marriage among the Irulas, the parents of the boy



visit the bride's house with two iron rods. The tribal priest plays a significant role in it. Among the Mudugas, marriage is performed by the initiation of the bridegroom's family, and they would try to get the consent of the bride's family. However, generally, the bridegroom would be either the son of the maternal uncle or the son of the paternal aunt. The first process of this marriage ceremony is to fix the date in the presence of the headman or *Ooru Mooppan*.

The tribal community is divided into different clans, and marriage within one's own clan is strictly prohibited. Among the Kurumbas, marriage generally would be within one's own community. These marriages are normally arranged with the consent of the parents of both families. Dowry is non-existent among them. However, there is a practice of bride price given by the bridegroom to the bride. It would be collected on the occasion of the marriage from all the relatives of the bridegroom. It used to be 101.25 rupees. Nowadays, for arranged marriages, the bridegroom's families have started to demand dowry due to other social group's intervention. Ninety per cent of the marriages in Attappady have been made by choice in the past few years. Among the tribal groups, both men and women have the right to choose their spouses.

### **3.3 Names of the Hamlets**

The names of these hamlets and the panchayat they belong to are important here. This will help to understand the geographical location of the visited hamlets, and hence, their ease of access to facilities. The hamlets I visited for the study were distributed across the three panchayats in Attappady. These hamlets are distinct from one another, particularly in terms of their location, and accordingly, their access to educational institutions, hospitals, markets, and availability of job opportunities. In the table below the access to two major government institutions are depicted along

with the information of visited hamlets. ITDP is the centre for the welfare programmes for the tribal communities. It is a complex of the Block Panchayat also, so that tribal people have regular contact with these institutions to enquire about the housing schemes, scholarships, water connections, land and so on. The Government Tribal Specialty Hospital, Attappady is the only hospital which specifically functions for the tribal communities.

### 3.3.1. Irulas

Eleven Irula hamlets are selected from Agali, Pudur and Sholayur panchayats.

Table 3.3.1. Irulas

| <b>Name of the hamlet</b> | <b>Respondents</b> | <b>Panchayat</b> | <b>Distance to ITDP (km)</b> | <b>Distance to Government Tribal Specialty Hospital (km)</b> |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pudur                     | 10                 | Pudur            | 19                           | 7                                                            |
| Nallashinka               | 10                 | Sholayur         | 20                           | 15                                                           |
| Bodichala                 | 8                  | Sholayur         | 6                            | 4                                                            |
| Paloor                    | 10                 | Pudur            | 18                           | 23                                                           |
| Anakkatti                 | 10                 | Sholayur         | 18                           | 9                                                            |
| Kallakkara                | 10                 | Sholayur         | 23                           | 3                                                            |
| Kunnanchala               | 10                 | Agali            | 8                            | 14                                                           |
| Keeripathy                | 5                  | Sholayur         | 7                            | 14                                                           |
| Vattlakki OLH             | 7                  | Sholayur         | 18                           | 6                                                            |
| Vadakottathara            | 10                 | Agali            | 15                           | 2                                                            |
| Vannanthura               | 10                 | Agali            | 14                           | 2                                                            |

*Source: Field data*

### 3.3.2. Kurumbas

Ten Kurumba hamlets are selected from the Pudur panchayat. The respondents from the hamlet of Ooradam are visited from the Agali Panchayat because respondents are currently living near to Kottathara Government Tribal Specialty Hospital for five years for the treatment of sickle cell anaemia.

Table 3.3.2. Kurumbas

| <b>Name of the hamlet</b> | <b>Respondents</b> | <b>Panchayat</b> | <b>Distance to ITDP (km)</b> | <b>Distance to Government Tribal Specialty Hospital (km)</b> |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Anavayi                   | 9                  | Pudur            | 33                           | 43                                                           |
| Kadukamanna               | 6                  | Pudur            | 36                           | 46                                                           |
| Thadikund                 | 7                  | Pudur            | 21                           | 33                                                           |
| Murukala                  | 5                  | Pudur            | 22                           | 34                                                           |
| Kurukkathikkallu          | 8                  | Pudur            | 20                           | 23                                                           |
| Gottiyarkandi             | 8                  | Pudur            | 19                           | 22                                                           |
| Mele Bhoothayar           | 9                  | Pudur            | 24                           | 37                                                           |
| Pazhur                    | 8                  | Pudur            | 21                           | 34                                                           |
| Idavani                   | 5                  | Pudur            | 23                           | 10                                                           |
| Ooradam                   | 4                  | Pudur            | NA                           | NA                                                           |

*Source: Field data*

The distance between Oredam hamlet and ITDP/ Government Tribal Specialty Hospital is not clear but it takes a one day journey by foot within the forest to reach the hamlet. Similarly, Oredam hamlet's distance to ITDP, Agali is not clear but it takes a one day journey by foot within the forest to reach the hamlet.

### 3.3.3. Mudugas

Ten Muduga hamlets were visited from Agali and Pudur panchayats.

Table 3.3.3. Mudugas

| <b>Name of the hamlet</b> | <b>Respondents</b> | <b>Panchayat</b> | <b>Distance to ITDP (km)</b> | <b>Distance to Government Tribal Specialty Hospital (km)</b> |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mukkali                   | 10                 | Agali            | 19                           | 25                                                           |
| Cholakkadu                | 10                 | Agali            | 20                           | 20                                                           |
| Karara                    | 10                 | Agali            | 10                           | 23                                                           |
| Beeranur                  | 10                 | Agali            | 16                           | 29                                                           |
| Polttikkallu              | 10                 | Pudur            | 6                            | 19                                                           |
| Vetiyur                   | 10                 | Pudur            | 6                            | 19                                                           |
| Kallamala                 | 10                 | Agali            | 12                           | 25                                                           |
| Kuchimedu                 | 10                 | Agali            | 4                            | 17                                                           |
| North Ommala              | 10                 | Agali            | 13                           | 26                                                           |
| Dondoor                   | 10                 | Agali            | 13                           | 18                                                           |

*Source: Field data*

From the above tables it is understood that Kurumbas have less access to these two government institutions than the other two tribal communities. For the Kurumba community due to the lack of road connectivity, there are no vehicles directly accessing the hamlets except the hamlets of Anavayi, Thadikund, Gottiyarkandi and Kurukkathikallu. There are intersections towards these four hamlets and private transport services such as jeep and auto rickshaw are available. For the rest of the hamlets, they need to walk a distance of kilometres to get any private transport to reach these two government institutions. Kurumba communities need to spend 500 to

1000 rupees for the transport to reach hospitals. Therefore, for the tribal communities reaching such offices is expensive, especially to access the health service. It is not only about the hospital and the ITDP, but also for the services such as markets, health centres, PDS ration shops, agriculture department, and schools they have to travel in the same way. For the other two tribal communities, there are private services such as jeep and auto-rickshaw available, but it is not on a regular basis. The details about access to these services are discussed in the following chapters.

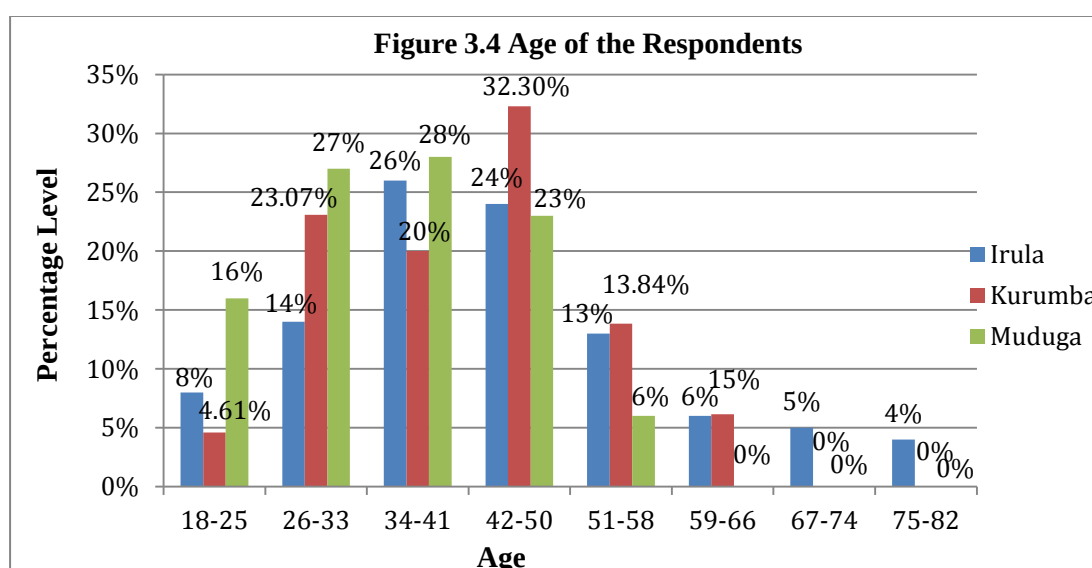
### **3.4 Age of the Respondents**

The field study was conducted among different age groups of married women. Only married women were chosen as respondents because I observed that the married women were more marginalised inside the marginalised tribal community on the basis of their education, household responsibility, marital status, occupation and income. Married tribal women suffered more physical abuse in the households in terms of restrictions on their free mobility, land rights, resource allocation and so on. This does not mean that unmarried tribal women were not deprived in their community as well as society. Comparing married women with unmarried women, the former were more vulnerable as they were also denied their right to education, occupation, income, land rights and so on.

The age range of the respondents indicates intergenerational disparities among them influenced by their experiences as evidenced by their life narratives, and livelihood changes. Their age, experience and intensity of livelihood changes were also different for these women. For instance, the women aged 50 years or more had experienced the old days of self-sufficiency when the tribal group practised shifting cultivation and utilised forest resources. In this manner, the respondents from the field

can be divided into two age categories. Women below the age group of 50 and those above 50 years were different with regard to their education, life experience in the forest and their relation with land and forest. The respondents in this age group had also experienced the bitterness of bonded labour, land encroachment, and abuse at the hands of other social groups on their soil. But, at the same time women above 50 years had enough agriculture production when they were young, their income was low. It is observed that the present younger generation does not know much about shifting cultivation nor are they allowed to do shifting cultivation as it is restricted by the government. The younger respondents below this age group and above 18-years-old have had access to formal school education, the impact of which can be seen in their daily lives and in their awareness and utilisation of development programmes. The multiple narratives from the respondents can further be categorised into those surrounding traditional agriculture, forest-based occupations, natural resource utilisation, and the impact of formal education. The age of the respondents is depicted in the table below.

Figure 3.4 Age of the Respondents



Source: Field data

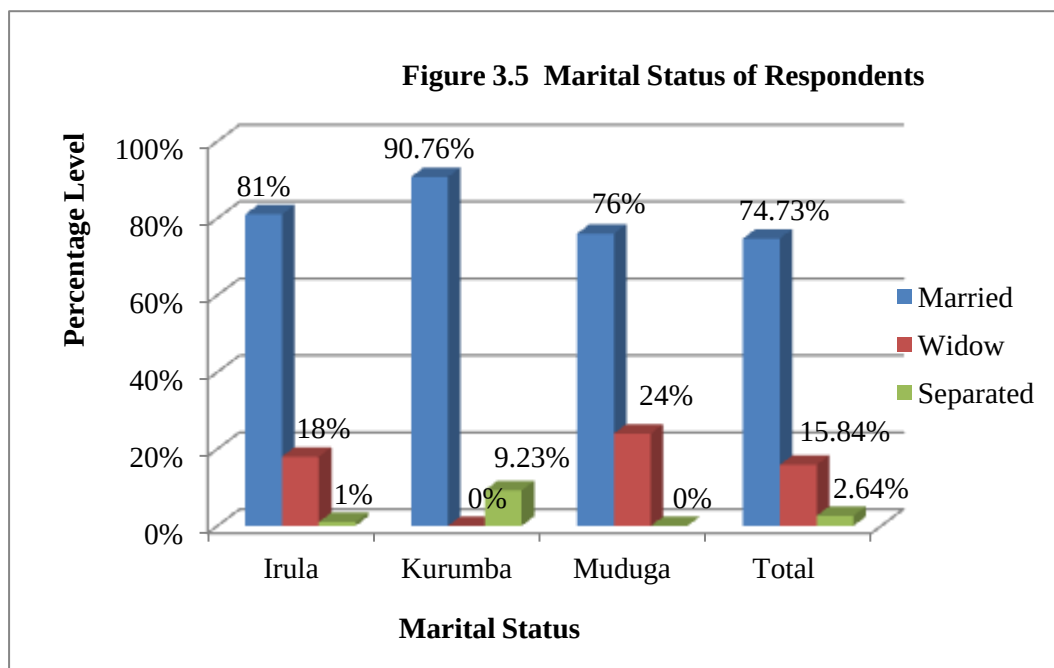
Majority of the respondents were from the age groups of 18-25, 26-33, 34-41 and 42-50 as this age group was more willing to talk about their experiences during my interactions. However, older respondents shared their experiences of loss of land and their transition from self-sufficient community life to one that was dependent on welfare policies. The respondents said that their life was not that difficult in those days as they had all sorts of edible items available, particularly, small animals, fish, wild tuber, leafy vegetables, ethno medicine, wild honey, etc. which are no longer available to the respondents nowadays. This does not mean that the respondents in the age groups of 18-25 and 26-33 were not informative. These respondents shared their experiences of their formal school education days, and the difficulties the respondents faced in re-adjusting to their life in the hamlets when they dropped out of their schools and hostels. They shared their experience in finding occupations, how they managed the livelihood deprivation and so on.

### **3.5 Marital Status**

The majority of the households in tribal communities have male heads. The three tribal communities are giving importance to the family and family relationships. The tribal communities lived in joint families, extended families and nuclear families. It was also acceptable among the family that the newly wedded couple has the freedom to live separately after marriage. It is also acceptable that the women can live in their own hamlet with their spouse after marriage but the decision making in the household is still done by the male member (spouse). There is even an idea that tribal women have the right to marry the person they like and to separate from their spouse as they wish. However, the tribal women are still marginalised in their access to resources, division of labour, the double burden of work, control over resource

management, mobility due to childbearing and rearing, sexuality, control over skills, marital and sexual abuse within and outside the community and other issues.

Figure 3.5 Marital Status of Respondents



Source: Filed data

According to the table above 74.73 per cent of women are married, 15.84 per cent of women are widowed and 2.64 per cent of women are separated from their spouses. As per the response from the health officials, there are early deaths of men among the tribal communities, especially among the Muduga community due to alcoholism. The women said that men are addicted to alcohol and so they died of heart failure at the age of 45 to 55. It is also a reason for women to take up the household responsibility at a younger age. The suicidal death of tribal men is also common there; a tribal activist Murukan said that many tribal men committed suicide due to alcoholism and unemployment but it is not registered in the media. Attappady is an alcohol-free zone but the migrant settlers sell alcohol without any permission. Many incidents that the tribal people informed about the exploitation of tribal people by the migrant settlers. When illegal alcoholic consumption is caught, it is always



tribal men who are targeted and the real culprits are behind the veil. A tribal leader Vaduki Amma working with the police department said that the migrant settler men are exploiting tribal women by marrying them to sell alcohol and other narcotics.

It was found that the Kurumbas preferred to have more than five children after marriage. As I understood from my interaction with the respondents, having more children was the decision of the husband. Earlier, tribal women delivered in the hamlets only. Nowadays, the tribal people prefer to go to hospitals with the ITDP regulations to prevent infant death. According to the field study and my interaction with the NGOs, the lack of nutrition among pregnant women was a major reason for the reported IMR (Infant Mortality Rate) among the tribal people in Attappady. According to a study by the National Institute of Nutrition conducted in 2013, the IMR (Infant Mortality Rate) in the Attappady region was 66 compared to 12 in the rest of Kerala. In the Kurumba hamlets, they faced difficulty to reach the hospital at the time of labour due to a lack of transport facilities. The respondents said that they had to carry the pregnant women on makeshift stretchers to reach the hospital at times when the hospital refused to send an ambulance to the hamlet. The Kurumba hamlets I visited were near the riverbank and had handmade bamboo bridges across them; especially during monsoon, the women said that it was difficult for the pregnant women to cross the bridge since it was built from the top of the trees. The hamlet dwellers recounted how many times they demanded a bridge across the river but how the authorities neglected them. There was less interest among the Tribal Extension Officers towards the tribal hamlets; the ST promoters also did not regularly visit the hamlets to take care of their needs mainly because of the negligence of the Tribal Extension Officers to monitor the grassroots work of the ST promoters.

### **3.6 Education of the Respondents**

Formal education plays an important role in the welfare of a community. It determines the socio-economic condition of a group, as there is a strong relationship between education and economic status. Formal education has a positive impact on one's occupational status, economic condition, mortality, hygiene, health, and the well-being of the family. There were several constitutional provisions made for the enhancement of tribal education in Kerala and major policies were implemented under the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) of the Fifth Five-year Plan during 1974-78 in India (Suresh 2014). The policies like National Educational Policy have not reached them to provide formal education to the tribal communities. The Model Residential Schools, Post-matric Hostels, Pre-matric hostels, etc. were established by the government to provide education for the tribal communities living in remote areas. However, it is evident that the government provided all infrastructural facilities and educational inputs, but not in an inclusive way which is why there are still dropouts of children from these schools (Kakkoth 2012). The attitude of teachers towards the tribal children and the displacement of the tribal children from their habitat to residential schools at a very young age are some of the reasons for the increasing dropout rate. Thus interacting with the younger respondents and the girls who are studying in the 10<sup>th</sup> class and higher secondary level, they were informed that the teachers did not motivate them towards higher education from the school authorities and also the teachers showed no interest in the tribal students to lead them to choose which subject for higher secondary education or for the graduation.

Kerala achieved universal enrolment in primary school education through remarkable programmes like the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) which introduced innovative learning methods and

engaged children in innovative projects (Bhaskaran 2011). As per the findings of the field study, the majority of the respondents are unable to read or write due to the lack of formal school education, which shows the poor implementation of education programmes for tribal communities. In fact, the tribal education plan still follows the mainstream curriculum. The majority of the academicians in the Board of Education are from other social groups, and they are either unaware of, or ignore, the problems faced by tribal communities to attain formal education. The tribal children hail from entirely different living situations compared to that of children from other social groups. There is a wide literacy gap between the tribal people and other social groups in Kerala. The literacy rate of tribal people in Kerala is 75.81% while that of the other social groups is 93.91% according to the 2011 census report. When the non-tribal male and female literacy rate is 96 and 92 per cent respectively, the male and female literacy among tribal people is 64 and 56 per cent respectively.

Table 3.6 Education of the Respondents

| <b>Education</b>           | <b>Irula</b> | <b>Kurumba</b> | <b>Muduga</b> |
|----------------------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| No formal education        | 34%          | 55.38%         | 19%           |
| Lower Primary <sup>2</sup> | 32%          | 21.53%         | 41%           |
| Upper Primary              | 17%          | 13.84%         | 22%           |
| High School                | 13%          | 3.07%          | 11%           |
| Higher Secondary           | 4%           | 6.15%          | 7%            |
| Graduation                 | 0%           | 0%             | 0%            |
| Post-graduation            | 0%           | 0%             | 0%            |
| Others                     | 0%           | 0%             | 0%            |

*Source: Field data*

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<sup>2</sup>Kerala state Education Board divided the school system into different levels such as Kindergarten (LKG and UKG), LP (lower primary, classes/standard 1–4), UP (upper primary, classes/standard 5–7), (H.S) High School (classes/standard 8–10) and Higher Secondary (+1 equals 11th class/standard and +2 equals 12th class/standard).

According to the table above, tribal women have less access to formal education. 33.38% of tribal women across the three communities had no formal school education which is a large fraction of all the respondents. The absence of schools near the hamlets was a major reason for their illiteracy. There were multiple reasons found during the fieldwork such as their health conditions during childhood, financial problems in the family, the distance of schools from the respondents' hamlets, lack of transport facilities to reach schools, wild animals, the responsibility of younger siblings and so on. Most of the tribal settlements were located in remote areas and there are fewer transport facilities. There are physical barriers like rivers, forests, and hills on their way. And so, the parents of the respondents were scared to send them to school due to concerns about their safety in the company of other social groups. The respondents stated that their parents were hesitant to send their daughters to hostels due to the cultural barriers that frown upon them. The lack of adequate residential schools during their childhood was one of the reasons cited by the women above the age of 45 years for their illiteracy. The elderly women respondents informed that they could not go to school in their childhood as their parents were facing financial problems. Some of the respondents said that during childhood their mother got ill so they needed to take care of younger siblings and help their father on farmland. That is why they could not go to school for formal education. In my interactions with the older women, I could understand that their brothers were able to attain education even when the respondents were restricted from going to school because their parents agreed to send their sons to hostels for education. The male privilege among the tribal communities can be understood from these narrations. They reveal that in the past the eldest girl child in a household was deprived of the opportunity to go to school due to these responsibilities, but, at present, changes can

be seen in some of the opinions held by the tribal communities. As a result, girl children have started going to nearby schools and residential schools in other places in Kerala as well. Some respondents raised that if they could go to school it would help them to get a good occupation and life would become better than what it is now.

Kurumbas are geographically isolated from the other two tribal communities and the mainstream society, socially and economically. The lack of formal school education was a ground reality and a major reason for the deprivation in the lives of the Kurumbas, especially the women. Since they lived inside the forest, the tribal people did not have access to any other educational institution other than the residential school. Despite these obstacles, there were respondents who passed 12<sup>th</sup> class examinations but were not able to go for higher education. A respondent from the hamlet of Pazhur said that she got married when she was in the eleventh class and could not appear for the 12<sup>th</sup> class (higher secondary exam).

During my interaction with the tribal women, I could understand that even though they were educated up to seventh grade, they could not read or write. The respondents informed that in the midst of family responsibilities and the hectic household chores, they do not find time to read or write. Also, they did not have access to reading material even the daily newspaper was not accessible to them.

### **3.7 Types of House and Ownership**

Housing is a basic human right for people to shelter; keep their animals, store food grains and stay safe. A house is considered an important factor for the well-being of people. In the case of tribal communities, it is also closely connected to their environment and the tribal houses were built on tribal farmlands earlier. It observed that during the 1970s the tribal houses were relocated from the farmlands to the

hamlets with the houses constructed by the governments for the easy control over the tribal communities through the decentralised government and the state named these tribal hamlets are ‘colonies’ (Nair S and Sajeev M V., 2021). It is understood that the concrete houses built under the several state schemes were not much concerned about the tribal communities’ priorities and requirements. It was also observed that housing for the tribal communities in Attappady was still progressing at a deplorable rate with respect to funding allocation, construction, provision of amenities, and so on. The data on the ownership of houses and sources of funds are given in the table below:

Table 3.7.1. Ownership of House

| Community | Have   | Do not Have | Ownership of the House |                                  |
|-----------|--------|-------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|
|           |        |             | Own                    | Husband/Parents/In-Laws/Siblings |
| Irula     | 96%    | 4%          | 47%                    | 49%                              |
| Kurumba   | 100%   | 0%          | 7.69%                  | 92.30%                           |
| Muduga    | 100%   | 0%          | 32%                    | 68%                              |
| Total     | 98.49% | 1.50%       | 31.69%                 | 66.79%                           |

Source: Field Data

Table 3.7.2. Source of Fund

| Source of fund | One lakh scheme | Kurumba Package | IAY/PMAY | AHADS  |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|--------|
| Irula          | 29%             | 0%              | 43%      | 24     |
| Kurumba        | 0%              | 15.38%          | 26.15%   | 58.46% |
| Muduga         | 0%              | 0%              | 32%      | 68%    |

Source: Field data

Table 3.7.3. Status of House Construction

| Community | Completed | Partially Completed |
|-----------|-----------|---------------------|
| Irula     | 79%       | 17%                 |
| Kurumba   | 84.61%    | 15.38%              |
| Muduga    | 76%       | 24%                 |

Source: Filed data

Four types of funding schemes are implemented for providing housing to the tribal communities during different time periods, such as the One Lakh Housing programme<sup>3</sup>, Indira Awas Yojana and Pradhan Manthri Awas Yojana (IAY/PMAY)<sup>4</sup>, the Kurumba Package<sup>5</sup> and Attappady Hill Area Development Society (AHADS) in the hamlets visited. The One Lakh Housing programme was implemented by panchayats and the Attappady Block Panchayat, and the IAY/PMAY and Kurumba Package are under the supervision of the ITDP Project Officer. Houses constructed by the AHADS involved the participation of the members of each household. The majority of the houses for Kurumbas and Mudugas were constructed by the AHADS, in which each beneficiary household had to provide labour for construction activities for the tribal communities. The houses constructed by One Lakh Housing programme and Kurumba package are roofed with terracotta tiles and the other housing projects have concrete roofs.

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<sup>3</sup>One Lakh Housing Scheme was launched by the government of Kerala in 1972.

<sup>4</sup>Indira Awas Yojana (IAY/PMAY) was launched by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 as a rural housing scheme targeting SC/ST and Minority populations and later extended to cover all Below Poverty Line (BPL) population. Later it merged with Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana launched by Prime Minister Naendra Modi in June 2015.

<sup>5</sup>Kurumba Package is a housing scheme for the particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) by the PVTG scheme.

In the hamlets of Idavani, Kurukkathikkallu, Gottiyarkandi, and Thadikund, the houses have terracotta tile roofs and concrete floors with tiny rooms. These houses were constructed over three decades ago, so the majority of the houses were in danger of being partially destroyed or did not have doors or windows. The houses constructed by AHADS in Anavayi, Kadukamanna, Pazhur, Melebhoothar and Murukala constituted a kitchen, a bedroom and a living room along with a veranda but these houses did not have the basic amenity of toilets. There are multiple responses from the respondents that they are not comfortable to keeping toilets inside the house. However, toilets were included in the project. A room has been built for the toilet inside the house, but the accessories required for the toilet are not included. Most of the houses in the visited hamlets of the three communities had no toilet facilities. Toilets are not constructed under the IAY/PMAY project due to the lack of funds. The only difference between the two schemes was that the construction activities under AHADS provided jobs to the tribal community members, whereas the IAY/PMAY scheme assigned the task to a contractor.

The tribal communities used to have a separate space to keep their animals and firewood near their huts in the hamlets. When there were only huts in the hamlets, the tribal communities had enough space for playgrounds, where they held their community gatherings and rituals, and children used to play and so on. When the population of the hamlet increased, the number of concrete houses also increased, affecting the availability of space, and as a result, the land for community gatherings was closed and shifted to a closed 'community centre' for tribal communities in each hamlet, built by the AHADS and ITDP. As there is less availability of community land due to the encroachment by the migrant settlers in the land, there is a limitation in space to construct houses in the hamlets, so the present houses are constructed in a



limited space very close to another. These constraints resulted in an inadequate drainage system, lack of toilet facility and space for cattle herding.

The IAY/PMAY housing scheme was sanctioned in the name of the woman/female member of the household, which is why there is 31.69 per cent of respondents shown as having ownership of houses in the table above but there is 72.07 per cent of houses constructed under IAY/PMAY scheme. The respondents said that so the houses are sanctioned in their name, they had to take up the responsibility as husbands were not willing to help. They also added that the basic opposition from the side of men is that they do not get money for the consumption of alcohol. The women held that the construction could be completed as the money was sanctioned in their name. But, sometimes they got delayed in going to work or missed going to work as they had to do everything ranging from the collection of building material to finding workers to construct the house and getting the electricity connection and so on. When I asked about the reason for sanctioning the house in the name of women, the answer given by the ITDP was that women were good at organising things and they would also be more responsible to construct the houses on time compared to the men who were irresponsible and would spend the money for their personal expenses. This increased the drudgery of women, as it had to be managed along with household work and wage labour.

Women lacked the time to coordinate their house constructions along with their work in the NREGA. Among the tribal communities, the Kurumbas had to carry the materials to the hamlets on their heads due to bad road connectivity to the hamlets. The lack of connectivity to the Kurumba hamlets, especially in crossing the river, hindered the transportation of materials. It was observed during my field visit to Murukala hamlet that the river was filled with rocks and there was no proper boat to

cross the river. The women kept the building materials on a raft to cross the river. In Kadukamanna hamlet, the people had to carry the materials as head loads across the river to their hamlet on top of the hills.

Each beneficiary received four lakhs from the block panchayat to construct a house under the IAY/PMAY scheme. The respondents claimed that it was not sufficient for them to construct a house. It was expensive to buy the building materials from outside Attappady. The building materials were bought either from Coimbatore of Tamil Nadu or Mannarkkad of Kerala. Since their hamlets were located in remote areas, it was difficult to transport the construction materials including bricks, sand, cement, etc. which also raised the cost of transport and labour charges. The truck drivers from other social groups also exploited the tribal women by levying extra charges. A large portion of the funds was used for transportation in this manner, which made it difficult to construct a house even with financial assistance from the government.

The respondents also faced exploitation from the contractors which made it difficult for them to complete the construction on time. Some of the houses were not constructed completely. Some houses did not have adequate flooring, windows and doors and on top of that, no toilet facilities. The study found that 19.24 per cent of respondents had houses that were partially constructed, which was mostly caused by the delay in sanction of funds. Under the IAY/PMAY scheme, the entire amount for the construction of the house is not sanctioned in one go; it is given in different phases such as the construction of the foundation, walls, and concreting the rooftop and so on. The respondents said that it took years to get sanctions for each segment. This affected their work and income from NREGA; they could not even meet their daily needs with the money they had been receiving, and they could not afford to chip in

the extra money to complete their house construction. It was found that house construction took up to seven years to complete; till then, the respondents were forced to stay in tents made with tarpaulin sheet walls with asbestos sheet roofs. The fund allocated to the beneficiaries alone is not enough in such situations; there were other challenges that the respondents had to overcome.

The implementation of the housing schemes affected the shifting cultivation practised by the tribal communities. When the tribal people participated in the construction of houses, it affected the livelihoods of the tribal communities as they could not manage cultivation along with the construction work. The respondents from Nallashinka and Keeripathy said that they used to live in their *panchakkadu* earlier, and now, they are displaced from their own houses and *panchakkadu* using the housing schemes. The Keeripathy hamlet dwellers said that they were displaced from their old hamlets to the new hamlets with the establishment of AHADS, while the Nallashinka hamlet was displaced in 1972 when the One Lakh Housing programme was launched in Kerala. Being displaced from their agricultural land, the tribal communities could not properly care for their agriculture, which is one of the reasons why they stopped cultivation. So, in a way, the housing scheme implemented in Attappady failed to retain the livelihood sources of the tribal communities.

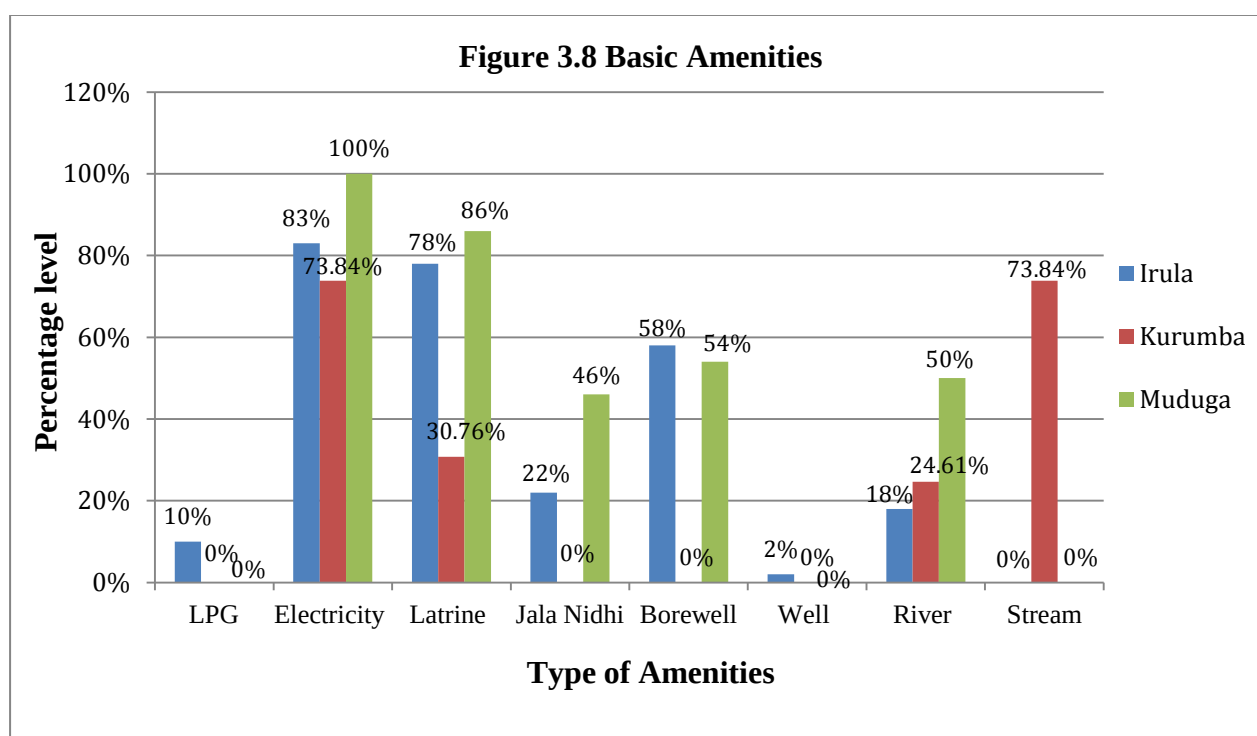
In my interactions with the respondents, I understood that they still liked to live in their traditional houses rather than the concrete houses provided by the state. The traditional houses were cool and warm according to the season, but the new houses are very humid. It was difficult to stay in the new houses with no proper doors and windows during the winter especially for the elderly and the children during winters and monsoons. The older respondents used to lay on the cement floor and suffered from body aches and breathing problems since they did not have cots to lay

down. This was especially so in the case of the houses built by AHADS in the Kurumba hamlets. The high altitude of the hamlet added to the low temperature. When these issues were raised as issues, the AHADS officials said that they would fix the doors and windows, but only at the end of the project but it did not happen.

### **3.8 Basic Amenities**

Access to basic amenities such as drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and drainage are essential for a secure, dignified and healthy human life (Kumar 2014). The tribal communities in Kerala are deprived of such facilities even though Kerala has the highest human development index figures in the country. The hamlets visited for the study were especially deprived of their access to basic amenities, which indicates poor implementation of development schemes by the state. The main sources of water, for both irrigation and household needs, for the tribal hamlets in Attappady are the river and streams in the forest. They are deprived of many resources like drinking water, sanitation, electricity, LPG connections, etc. when compared to other social groups in the state. Most of this deprivation stems from their remote location of residence. Agarwal (2016) points out that environmental degradation affects women more than men as they have to fetch water, collect fuel and fodder, feed the family, and become forest conservators, while the men treat nature as a commodity. She also added that the poor rural women depend on the forest as a means of sustainability.

Figure 3.8 Basic Amenities



Source: Field Data

### 3.8.1. LPG and Electricity

From the table above, one can see that only ten households used LPG as a source of cooking fuel out of 100 Irula households; among the Kurumba and Muduga households, none of the visited households had LPG connections. The major reason behind not using LPG is the lack of income in tribal households. This is indicative of the deprivation in the income of the respondents as well as the households to avail LPG fuel for cooking. The majority of these households depended on firewood as fuel for cooking and other purposes. Hence, deforestation adversely affected the tribal women as they had to walk long distances to collect the wood, they used to walk one or two kilometres earlier, but now, they had to walk over five kilometres and even cross the river to complete the chore. Since women carried the wood as head loads, it was hazardous to their health. It was also time-consuming, and so, the women

sometimes had to skip meals or they would simply be too tired to carry out their responsibilities along with the NREGA labour (Krishna 2009). The forest officials also sometimes prevented the women from entering the forest.

The women went alone or as a group to collect the wood. Since the tribal hamlets were in a cluster situated in a limited space, each household had to share the space with others, which made it difficult to store wood. So, the women needed to go collect the wood every two or three days. Some of the respondents kept their firewood in their external toilets because they were unused due to water scarcity or were in deplorable condition. During the rainy season, it got difficult to keep the firewood dry, so it affected their cooking on a daily basis.

In the visited households, only 87.16 per cent of households had electricity connections, the rest depended on kerosene distributed by the PDS. It is especially among the Kurumba hamlets that there is less access to electricity because of the remote location of the hamlets. Some of the Kurumba hamlets were still not electrified, while some got electricity a year prior to my field visit. Among the Irula people, still 17 per cent of households do not have electricity. The respondents informed that electricity connection is too expensive for them due to their poor economic condition. The Muduga respondents also said the same. Many had been using solar power provided by the forest officials before that, especially in the hamlets of Idavani, Mele Boothar and Kadukamanna, which still had a small number of electricity connections.

### **3.8.2. Toilets**

It was found that every household did not have a toilet facility. There was only 69.43 per cent of households that had a toilet facility among the selected households

and the others did not have it. However, I could also see that even though some households had toilets, they still did not use them. As mentioned in the previous section, one main reason for this was the scarcity of water. The usage of toilets also required more water, which they had to manually carry over long distances. In the hamlets of Anakkatti, Thadikkunudu, Idavani and Murukala, 30.56 per cent of the households did not have toilet facilities. Along with water scarcity, the lack of income and sufficient allocation of funds from the government also prevented many from constructing toilets, as was mentioned earlier, even though the respondents acknowledged that they wished to have a toilet in their house.

### **3.8.3. Jalanidhi, Borewell and River**

As has been maintained in the sections above, the scarcity of safe drinking water is a major issue that is being faced by the tribal communities of Attappady today. Their landscape also meant that there is a shortage of drinking water in the wells here. Therefore, extracting groundwater and river water distributed by the panchayat were the only sources of water for the tribal people, other than collecting it manually from the forest. A total of 25.66 per cent of respondents had access to the Jalanidhi scheme which was a project initiated by the Government of Kerala. These respondents also had borewells provided by the ITDP for the hamlets. It was found that this facility was available to the Irula and Muduga communities, but in the case of the Kurumbas, such facilities were not available.

In the Jalanidhi project, water from the rivers Bhavani and Siruvani was pumped into a huge water tank constructed on one of the hills for the whole population of Attappady. It is accessible to the hamlets on every alternate morning only for one hour; so, the women had to collect the water in their vessels within the

limited time. This was the biggest hurdle for the women to go for wage labour during the day. Regardless of the availability of water sources, the women are burdened by the task of finding and collecting water, even if it means walking long distances during the summers when there is a general water shortage. Collecting water in those circumstances added to their workload along with the demands of their occupation and household chores. Thus, it can be said that water scarcity affects men and women in the same social location differently.

The scarcity of water in the tribal hamlets lasted for six months of the year- beginning from December to the end of June, with the advent of monsoon. It was expensive for the households to bring water to their households during this period. There are some households that have good income. They used to collect water from long distances by carrying it in vehicles. The allocation of water itself was based on the lines of caste and class. The richer households were able to tap into the resource for even irrigation, apart from drinking and other daily requirements by digging deeper wells and tube wells. But, the poorer households had to adjust with the surface level water, which was mostly scarce and contaminated (Agarwal 2016). On hilly terrain like Attappady, the water shortage is very common but there is a disparity between the other social groups and tribal communities that other social group people can afford to dig wells due to their economic status.

Apart from Jalanidhi, the borewell was another source of water for the respondents. Except for the Kurumbas, the other two tribal communities had a borewell in their hamlets. However, these bore wells were not accessible to everyone on a regular basis, and their water was available to all the community members for one hour every alternate day. The women had to collect the water during that time. This was also disrupted at times by power failure or other mechanical issues in the



water pump, and so, there were times when the tribal people did not have water for days or weeks together. In those situations, the respondents had to minimise their use of water. For example, in Kunnachala (Irula Hamlet), there were three bore wells and one hand pipe, but only one bore well was functioning properly. It was difficult to pump water for all the households in the hamlet from it, so, the people had to wait for two or three days to get water.

This hamlet also did not have a river nearby, and the ITDP was distributing water to the tribal households. The respondents who lived near the river brought water home every day by carrying it on their heads. There were many water-borne diseases among the respondents due to such unsafe sources of water. UNICEF has been actively campaigning against unsafe water to prevent health problems and water-borne diseases in every hamlet of Attappady with the help of an NGO.

The river and/or streams are the major sources of water for the majority of the households in these hamlets. Small pipes are connected to storage tanks near their houses. The Kurumbas mostly utilise this source as they do not have any other option to bring water to their hamlets. The respondents told me that these pipes were broken by elephants sometimes, which made it difficult for them to collect water. The respondents of Mele Bhoothar (Kurumba) hamlet said that their pipes and water tanks were destroyed by elephants, and so they had to carry water from the stream to their hills. During summer, the streams that originated from the forest dried up, thus, they needed to walk more distances to collect water from the river and streams. The Irulas and Mudugas had the option of collecting water from the bore wells of other social groups or even carrying water from the river by vehicles, which was not available to the Kurumbas.

For the Kurumbas, it was difficult to access water distributed by the Panchayat because of their location inside the forest. The local administration also did not put much effort into ensuring the same. They provided the pipe connections as late as a year prior to my study in the hamlets here, which itself was unutilised, as the water was available through the pipes for over a year later. Though the tribal people gave complaints to the local administration, they did not respond with much enthusiasm.

The government had not taken any action to restore the water resources in Attappady. The AHADS project had constructed a few rainwater harvesting plants, but these have not been functional for several years. The NREGA workers built some check dams in the forest to conserve water, but they were destroyed in heavy rains during the monsoons. The NREGA also did not care about giving systematic instructions to the workers on constructing the check dam or conserving the natural stream. They did not seek the traditional knowledge of the tribal communities here, who knew about their own ecosystem better than the policymakers to conserve the natural resources. The policymakers did not emphasise the implementation of the programmes in collaboration with the tribal communities.

### **3.9 Agriculture**

Traditionally tribes of Attappady practice shifting cultivation. They use ash and cow dough as manure for cultivation. Apart from water from rivers, they are dependent on rain. It is their belief that rain would be a good source for cultivation. Their cultivation time starts in April by cutting the bushes and grass on the land. Once the bushes get dry they burn it to prepare the soil for cultivation. They believe that it would be good to prevent weeds. They start sowing seeds after the first rain. Since a great deal of the land under cultivation was on the hills or in uneven surfaces,

ploughing with animals was seldom practised. There were no separate plots for agriculture. They cultivated and made use of whatever part of the forest they chose to cultivate. The crops the tribal people cultivated were millets including Little Millet, Finger Millet, Foxtail Millet; pulses and cereals.

### **3.10 Development Programmes Implemented for Tribal People of Attappady**

The following sections elaborate on the development programmes specifically designed and implemented for the tribal communities of Attappady. They also throw light on the development programmes implemented in Kerala such as Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and Kudumbasree since these two programmes are also implemented for the tribal communities of Attappady.

#### **3.10.1. Integrated Tribal Development Project**

Attappady was declared the most deprived tribal region in Kerala, and the first Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) was implemented in Kerala in the Attappady tribal region in 1970. Since then, several development programmes have been implemented for the welfare of the tribal people there. The ITDP implemented new agricultural programmes, supplied grants for the purchase of agricultural equipment and cattle hearths, provided cattle and livestock for income generation, constructed wells and tanks, supplied pump sets, conducted programmes for soil conservation, and training for semi-skilled labour such as plumbing, wiring, tailoring, building construction, carpentry, horticulture and so on. Some of the programmes, especially training for semi-skilled labour, were found to be less effective for the tribal people in Attappady because the tribal communities have lesser opportunities today due to the dominance of other social groups in these occupations in Attappady.

### **3.10.2. Attappady Co-operative Farming Society**

The Attappady Co-operative Farming society was the next step taken after the ITDP. The project was implemented in 1975, and aimed to rehabilitate 420 tribal families and provide them with livelihood opportunities. There were four farms in Attappady under this project. The major crops cultivated on these farms were coffee, pepper, cardamom, clove, nutmeg, areca nut, coconut, ginger and turmeric. The rehabilitated tribal people worked as daily wage labourers on these farms. Five acres of land were distributed among these tribal people for their own cultivation as well. Many tribal people living in the hamlets near the farms went for daily wages seasonally on the farms for the wage rate of Rs 350 per day.

### **3.10.3. Attappady Valley Irrigation Project (AVIP)**

The Attappady Valley Irrigation Project was the next initiative taken during the year 1975. The objective of the project was to construct a dam across the river Siruvani, a tributary of Bhavani River. For the project, 150 tribal families were displaced from the area. Later, the project was dropped and the dam construction remained incomplete. The displaced tribal people were rehabilitated near the Siruvani river. I found during my fieldwork that, for the dam project, the tribal people were evacuated from their *panchakkadu* (farmland) as well, and the respondents stated that they did not get any land as compensation for that. The tribal people then had to engage in daily wage labour in the lands of other social groups, as they did not have any other source of income afterwards. Some houses were also constructed by the AVIP, with electricity provision, but these houses were in deplorable conditions.

#### **3.10.4. Attappady Hill Area Development Society**

The Attappady Wasteland Comprehensive Environmental Conservation Project was implemented from 1995 onwards with the financial assistance of 219 crore rupees from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIL) (Vishnudas, Svaninje and Zaag 2012). The objective of the project was the ecological restoration of Attappady by providing livelihood security for the tribal people through their participation in housing projects, and road connectivity through development programmes. These projects were implemented through the Attappady Hill Area Development Society, and the project ended in 2012. The houses constructed by the AHADS provided labour to the beneficiaries. Many check dams and rainwater harvesting units were implemented by the project. During the fieldwork, one could see that many of the rainwater harvesting units established by the AHADS were not functioning in the hamlets and were destroyed. AHADS was one of the leading projects that led tribal people to interact with other social groups, as the respondents said. It was observed that the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Scheme was implemented in 2005 in Attappady by the NRLM (National Rural Livelihood Mission) for hundred days of wage labour annually, and now, the scheme assures two hundred days of work per annum.

#### **3.10.5. Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)**

The scheme was intended to provide food for children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, lactating mothers and elderly people. It also provides education and health assistance for preschool children. Anganwadis are the primary level for the tribal children to learn Malayalam because they speak only tribal languages in the hamlets. It was observed that these essential services were not regularly distributed to

the beneficiaries. There was always a shortage of food grains in the Anganwadis. The ICDS workers in these Anganwadis were also irregular. The majority of these workers were from other social groups, so they did not show much interest in the well-being of the tribal children. In a few hamlets, it was found that the Anganwadis had not been functioning for months because they had no building. Funds were sanctioned for constructing the buildings, but they got delayed and the construction stopped, so the children could not go to Anganwadis before they joined their first grade in school.

### **3.10.6. Kudumbasree**

This was a special project for the tribal communities in Attappady implemented by the Kerala Kudumbasree Mission of the National Livelihood Mission, which provided microfinance, formed Neighbourhood Groups, Community Kitchen, bridge courses and tuitions for tribal children who dropped out of schools in the hamlets, and skill development for livelihoods. The Community Kitchen was initiated by the Social Justice Department for the tribal people, especially after the reporting of high infant mortality rates during 2013-2014. Later, this project was taken over by the Kudumbasree. The Community Kitchen is a nutrition-oriented programme initiated to provide three meals a day for children, adolescent girls, differently abled people, pregnant women, lactating mothers, and elderly people in the hamlets. The Community Kitchen is managed by the Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs). The menu for the Community kitchen is decided by the project coordinators without the participation of the NHGs. Except in Attappady, the NHGs constitute a mix of every social group in that area in the rest of the state. There were a number of projects implemented for other social groups. In Attappady, it was found that the majority of the projects for tribal livelihoods were not implemented, whereas other social groups

had the privilege to take up group farming, canteens, vegetable markets and supermarkets and so on. If opportunities like group farming were extended to the tribal women, it could help them revive their traditional shifting cultivation, and sustain the nutritional consumption and requirements of the whole household.

### **3.10.7. Kurumba Girijan Co-operative Society**

The Kurumba Girijan Service Co-operative Society was formed in 1976 as part of the Tribal Welfare Department's policy to look after the interests of the Kurumbas. It is for the welfare of the agricultural productivity of Kurumbas and to provide income to the tribal communities to collect minor forest produce. The implementation of co-operative societies is an attempt to limit the freedom for the tribal communities as they had the right to mobility in the forest. This also curtailed the freedom of the tribal communities to sell the produce outside of Attappady. There was a time before the commencement of the cooperative society when the tribal people used to sell their products outside of Attappady basically at Mannarkkad once a month. That was the trade that tribal communities performed, it included honey, leafy medicines, roots, and so on. That is why it is identified that forest resources were an important source for the tribal economy in Attappady. The centralisation of the forest produce and collection of it by the cooperative societies led to the loss of income for them. The livelihoods of each tribal group community, their access to resources and their utilisation are discussed in the following chapters.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Land, Agriculture and Food Security**

#### **Introduction**

Land and agriculture are connected to each other because they facilitate the important livelihood source for the tribal communities. It is found that there are many changes in the status of the landholdings and agriculture. Women's status in agriculture and land rights is connected to their role in shifting cultivation, especially in harvesting and post-harvesting work. This chapter discusses the major changes in the landholding of tribal communities and the changing role of tribal women in agriculture.

#### **4.1 Land**

The land was an important source of livelihood for the tribal people. Munshi (2012) says that the land is the only tangible asset of a tribal family, followed by minor forest products, and is a vital element in their subsistence. Therefore, lack of land as a resource was the most important cause of their livelihood deprivation and poverty. According to Karuppayyan (2000), land ownership among the tribal communities comes under three categories- community land, land belonging to a clan, and individual holdings. The Irulas and Mudugas had two types of land- one on the hilly terrains and the other on the plains near their hamlets and Kurumbas' land is in the hilly terrain. The tribal communities used to hold more than ten acres of land with them earlier for shifting cultivation. Encroachment by the people of other social groups on the tribal people's land on the plains forced them to resort to the hilly terrains for cultivation. In Attappady, land ownership was established in two ways- land that has document or title deeds, and the other as the mere right over



landholdings without a document<sup>6</sup>. A limited number of respondents had documents on the current lands that they owned. During the fieldwork, I understood that the migrant settlers (from non-tribal communities) exploited the tribal people's lack of information and grabbed their non-document land and created false documents in their own names.

Parvathy, a respondent from Nallashinka hamlet, said that her father had eight acres of land when she was young. At that time, a leading multinational company approached her family to take the land on lease to fix the windmills for electricity. Her father gave them the land and later got to know that the company made a false document in their name for the land and her family lost that land. Now, the respondent did not have the land to build a house, so she and her adult children lived in her mother's house. Chami from Paloor hamlet recently lost her land which she had leased out to a Tamil man who refused to give that land back and made a false document in his name. The land was taken away by people from other social groups under the pretence of leasing by the tribal people. The tribal people's fear of other social groups and lack of formal education limited their bargaining power to resist the migrant settlers.

Land dispossession and deprivation among the tribal communities of Attappady have been occurring for more than five decades. Tharakan (2007) points out that the space of the hamlets of the tribal communities contained a graveyard, farmland, water resources, hunting territory, and grazing land. However, the tribal hamlets were increasingly being surrounded by the lands of other social groups and

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<sup>6</sup> Permanent ownership of land.

settlements these days. Their land was occupied by the migrant settlers from South Kerala during the 1950s and by the Tamil Goundans during the 1960s (Kunhaman 1985). The Kerala Scheduled Tribal communities (Restriction of Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act 1975 restricted the transfer of land by the tribal community in the state of Kerala so as to restore the ownership of land appropriated by other social groups (Bijoy 1999). During the fieldwork, I realised that the provisions made by the government to restore the evicted tribal lands had not been beneficial to the tribal communities. The Mudugas still remained landless and did not get any land during the land restoration by the government. There are 144,386 cents of land that was allotted in Attappady during 1960-1980 (Kerala 2017). The table below shows the number of households which owned farmland here.

Table 4.1 Ownership of Land

| Ownership |                 |                  | Title deeds     |               |
|-----------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Own       | Husband/In-Laws | Parents/Siblings | Have title deed | No title deed |
| 7.92 %    | 44.15%          | 3.90 %           | 21.88%          | 33.96%        |

*Source: Field Data*

As per the above table, there were only 55.84 per cent of households who owned land. These lands were concentrated on the hill slopes. The land was owned either by the respondents themselves, or their husbands, parents or in-laws. Among them, land ownership was generally in the name of the head of the household or the men of the household. Often, there were women who took over ownership when their husband or sons died. According to the field study, many of the households of the respondents owned land, among which, only 7.92 per cent of respondents had land in their name. The ownership of land among the tribal communities is patrilineal. The land ownership goes to the sons of the family. If there is no son and only daughters in

a family, the ownership goes to the father's brothers or nephews. Tribal women's access to and control over land is important in determining the women's economic well-being, social status, and overall empowerment (Agarwal 2016). Access to land is also linked to access to agriculture, income, water and other inputs, and state support in cultivation and sustainability in livelihoods.

There were 44.15 per cent of households which do not own land currently. Some of their lands were taken by the forest department under the Forest Regulation Act. 31.50 per cent of women informed their memory of how they lost land during their childhood and younger age to the migrant settlers. The respondents informed that their households owned lands when they were young, but these lands were snatched by other social groups like the Tamils and Malayalis of Attappady. During the 1950s when there was widespread tribal land encroachment by the migrant settlers, the tribal communities were not monetized (Suresh 2001; Bijoy 1999; Raman 2017); the barter system was used to exchange goods (Suresh 2001). And so, the tribal people were exploited by the migrant settlers who offered *paan* and alcohol in exchange for land. Non-tribal people occupied the tribal lands by convincing the illiterate tribal people sign the lease agreements. Bijoy (1999) reveals that 10,10,619 acres of land were snatched by other social groups according to the official survey reports of the ITDP. With the migrant settlements situated close to their own land, the Irulas and Mudugas faced restrictions in space, affecting the construction of new houses for the new families in the hamlet. This forced many to move out to other hamlets where more land was available, dislocating from their sources of livelihood in the process.

It is found that loss of land was more among the Irula and Muduga communities while it affected the Kurumba community less. Maruthi, a respondent

from Vannanthura hamlet, said that her land was taken by a Tamil family thirty years ago. After much fighting between those families, Maruthi's husband forcefully encroached upon the land and made a hut in it. Now, the respondent and her husband live there. The legal procedure has been initiated to take back their land with the help of an NGO in Attappady. There were multiple kinds of dispossession that took place in Attappady when the tribal land was first given to the settlers for agricultural purposes; the owners were forcefully taken to Mannarkkad in Palakkad to register their land in the settlers' name. Land was also given to Tamil Goundans on lease by the tribal people, and later the Goundans took over the lands in their name. Tribal communities' lands were also lost after the implementation of the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 when their 'unattended land' became the property of the Forest Department (Bijoy 1999). Because of their illiteracy and low bargaining power, the tribal people were not aware of the details of the contract that they entered into with the settlers most of the time; the latter took advantage of this to snatch the tribal lands.

There were six respondents from Nallashinka hamlet who got 1 acre of land during the time of my field visit. Valli and Rami from those six respondents said that the land they got is far away from their hamlet. They already constructed a house in their hamlet with the help of IAY, so now moving to the newly acquired land is difficult for them. Going to the land and coming back to the hamlet is also inconvenient because they need to travel half a day to reach that land. The respondents also added that the land is not arable because of the rocks in it and also there is less water for irrigation. The respondents informed that they are trying to get land near their hamlet so that it would be helpful for them in cultivation. They said that 'our house is here, children are going to school, how can we go and stay in that land'. The respondents also added that there is no water source for irrigation on that

land, then how they can do agriculture. The Forest Department did not allow the families to break the rocks, cut the trees or burn the bushes for cultivation. This was how the Forest Department of Attappady interfered in the traditional agriculture of the tribal people. Valli recently completed the construction of her new house in the hamlet, so it was not possible for her to shift to the new land. When the government distributed land with documents, they were not concerned about the actual residences of the tribal people and allotted land somewhere in the hilly terrains of Attappady. Sometimes, it was not even in the panchayat where the person resided, so it became difficult for the tribal people to go there for cultivation. When I attended a meeting of the Revenue department, I met a Muduga man from Chittoor hamlet of Agali Panchayat, who was given a piece of land near Mele Bhoothayar, a Kurumba hamlet which is more than forty kilometres away from Chittoor hamlet.

Apart from the farmland, the land on which the hamlets were situated was in the name of *Ooru Mooppa* (the head man). This was a deliberate and collective decision taken by the community to manage the land together. As for the farmland, it was owned by the older male members of the household. In earlier times tribal communities had the right to cultivate the maximum extent of land therefore, each household used to have ten to fifteen acres of land. It was observed by Kunhaman (1985) that the forefathers of the tribal communities in Attappady organised and allotted land ownership for each household for slash and burn cultivation. Nevertheless, after the forest regulation and the intervention of the Forest Department, Kurumbas lost their land. The government introduced Acts such as the Wildlife Protection Act (1975), Forest Conservation Act (1980), and the National Forest Policy (1988) that deprived the tribal people of their right to forest. Many respondents had lost their land to the Forest Department in the name of forest conservation. Now, the

respondents' households did not have enough land for cultivation. This led to an acute shortage in their food crop production and hence the tribal communities are largely dependent on the public distribution system for food.

Ten respondents from Kuchimedu hamlet told their stories about how they lost their land. The tribal community from this hamlet was evicted by a farming society owned by one of the upper caste societies, Nair Service Society (NSS), to establish one estate of land in Attappady. Now the estate is located on the land that belongs to the tribal people of Kuchimedu hamlet. They were evicted from their own land and started living in the newly allotted hamlet for them, but there was no farmland allotted to them as compensation. So the people from this hamlet rely on the work in the estate of NSS and also go for NREGA work.

The land is also acquired by the state in the name of tribal development- for school buildings, roads and offices- without giving any compensation to the tribal people because the tribal lands did not have documents to claim the money, making it easy for the policymakers to grab tribal land. The Government Model Residential School near Mukkali was built by occupying the respondents' land without any compensation. The respondents are also unable to show documents for gaining subsidies and other financial aid from the government for agriculture.

## **4.2 Agriculture**

The tribal communities of Attappady, like several other forest-dwelling tribal communities, practised shifting cultivation for generations. The shifting cultivation of tribal communities was not only a source of food and self-sufficiency, but it was also how the tribal community lived as a society. This is how the community engaged in cropping and harvesting under the supervision of the *Mannukkaran*. *Mannukkaran*

literally translates to the soil man and is regarded as the guardian of agriculture by the tribal people in Attappady. The communities followed a structure of unity for shifting cultivation by mutual help extended during cultivation- in terms of preparing the land, sowing seeds and staying together in the field at night to prevent the destruction of crops by wild animals and so on. With the transition from shifting cultivation to settled cultivation (cash crops), this helping process got affected.

The tribal communities strongly believed that they belonged to the land. They did not claim any ownership rights over the land till the governments and non-tribal communities started driving them away from their habitat. The vast, ever-growing forests provided them an opportunity for shifting cultivation. Attappady was no exception to this. They cultivated the land for three years and left the land uncultivated for the next three years. They believed that this will help the soil regain its fertility. But, this was understood by the non-tribal societies and particularly the Forest Department that these lands were not cultivated and not owned. The tribal communities of Attappady call the land *kadu*, which means forest which reflects their understanding of their association with forest. State control, migrant settlements and other factors limited the tribal communities' access to land, that is forest and this curtailed their practice of shifting cultivation.

It is a slash and burn cultivation as it is mentioned already in chapter two. There are two types of equipment that tribal communities used for the cultivation *kothu* and *koonthali*<sup>7</sup>(Suresh 2001;Tharakan 2003). The cultivation of crops begins in April with the preparation of the farmland. Initially, they cut the bushes and the branches of the trees and burned them. The remaining ash was used as the primary manure for the cultivation of the fields. The sowing of seeds began after the first rain

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<sup>7</sup>*Kothu* and *Koonthali* are the two small size tools tribal people use for agriculture.

mostly during the month of May as the respondents informed. They rarely followed an order in sowing the seeds for cultivation, and mostly sowed at random. The crops include the pigeon pea, different varieties of beans, and then little millet, finger millet and foxtail millet and then corn. The millet crops are varied in different hamlets like there are Kodo millet and Kambam millet also used to cultivate, but these are not much available these days as the respondents informed.

After sowing the seeds, the entire family used to stay on the farmland till the end of harvest, or more precisely, till the end of January. People used to stay in the field at night to protect the crops from wild animals and supported one another from the stage of sowing seeds to harvesting them. During that time, other households in the hamlets also visited and took care of one another's land, which made it collective farming as mentioned in the earlier paragraph. As was the custom, every household prepared food to offer to the *Mannukkaran* after the first harvest. Now, the position of the *Mannukkaran* is just a formality since settled cultivation dominated the region. It is understood from the field responses that a small number of tribal households are practising shifting cultivation at present. There is only one per cent of households from Irula and Muduga communities that are practising shifting cultivation while there is 49.23 per cent of households from Kurumba community practising shifting cultivation. However, the respondents of the Kurumba community informed that they are practising cash crop cultivation along with shifting cultivation.

#### **4.2.1. The Factors that Affected the Agricultural Practices of Tribal Communities in Attappady**

It is understood from the narration of the tribal men that the cash crop has not come out well with a profitable income for them. The tribal communities were



utilising organic manure for cultivation. The respondents said that they used to put cow dung as an organic manure for their cultivation. For that, they used to keep animals in the field and not in a cattle shed. As there were fewer cattle these days, there was not enough manure for the cultivation needs, which affected the cash crop cultivation. Use of inorganic manure is essential to get good yield in cash crop cultivation. However, this affected the fertility of the soil, which was why some of the tribal people returned to shifting cultivation. Another reason informed by the respondents is that money is required to use the fertilisers and the agricultural equipment. Cultivation was not profitable and so they borrowed money from the money lenders that they used to borrow money for agriculture. Agarwal (2016) observes how agricultural modernisation affects the tribal people- livelihood was meant for subsistence and not for profit-making, so their relationship with cultivation and the forest was based on consumption and income for everyday subsistence only. The use of plough, hoe, tractor, and other agricultural tools for cash crop cultivation was also not affordable for the tribal people as it pushed many into indebtedness; when the indebted tribal people were unable to repay the borrowed money, many lost lands to the moneylenders.

#### **4. 2.1.1. Change in Crops Due to Loss of Land**

It was found that many reasons affected the shifting cultivation of the tribal communities. Irulas and Mudugas lost their land to the migrant settlers and to the state development initiatives. Kurumbas lost their land to the authority of the forest department. The non-tribal migrant settlers found it easier to occupy the lands of Irulas and Mudugas who lived in the plains area of Attappady. They did not hesitate to create false documents in their names. Having lost their agricultural land due to the above reasons, the tribal communities started cultivating the hill areas.

Many narratives emerged from the field regarding the tribal community's alienation from their land. The migrant settlers extended money to the tribal communities on credit for settled cultivation. When they failed to repay the debt, their land was grabbed by the moneylenders. The communities depended on rains to carry out shifting cultivation, while in the case of cash crops, they depended on irrigation, which was difficult to facilitate. Many of the tribal people became indebted to migrant settlers for irrigation, but later, due to the less income from the cash crops, they could not repay the amount; as a result, the migrant settlers took the tribal lands in their name. The fertility of the land was also affected due to the use of pesticides and inorganic manure in cash crop cultivation. In another instance, the respondents said that their grandparents sold their land to immigrant settlers for trivial articles like a piece of paan or alcohol. One of the older respondents said that, earlier, the tribal people followed the barter system in the community for wages, buying food grains and everything, and eventually, the migrant settlers used this as a strategy to snatch the tribal people's land. The respondents from Paloor hamlet recollected how their forefathers lost their lands by giving them for lease to individuals from other social groups. In the case of the land encroachment on Kurumba's land, the respondents said that their lands are taken by the forest officials to create the boundary for the forest land to prevent the entry of tribal people and other social groups.

Because of the declining size of land for shifting cultivation, the tribal people started to cultivate cash crops (settled cultivation) in the hilly terrains. Bijoy and Raman (2003) observe that, due to land encroachment, 62 per cent of tribal households in Kerala possessed less than two acres of land on an average. Gradually they moved towards cash crop cultivation such as pepper, turmeric, ginger, coffee, coconut, areca nut, cashew nut and so on for survival. However, they had very little

access to markets outside their hamlets, and more importantly, many of their agricultural products like millet crops did not have much demand in the mainstream society. Thus, selling their traditional agricultural products in the market was not a viable source of income for the tribal communities; this is also a reason for the shift to cash crop cultivation.

As practitioners of traditional shifting cultivation, it was a new experience for the tribal communities to get income from the cash crops. So, there was an assimilation of cash crops into the cultivation practices of the tribal communities in Attappady, which slowly became preferable over shifting cultivation because it was not income-oriented. The encroachment of migrant settlers into the tribal lands affected the landholdings of the tribal communities. In order to compensate for that, the tribal communities had to experiment with cash crop cultivation because shifting cultivation required wide expanses of land. This is how the Mudugas gradually started cultivating cash crops such as ginger, turmeric, areca nut, coconut, banana, plantain and so on in their farmlands.

#### **4.2.1.2. Marginalisation in Market**

The difficulty to survive in a market owned by the mainstream society affected the sales and marketing of the agricultural produce of the tribal people. The livelihoods of the tribal people used to be self-sufficient, and so, it was difficult for the respondents to shift to cash crop cultivation in their agricultural practices, and compete with the capitalist behaviour of the migrant settlers here (Sundar 2016). If the tribal people could get a market with the assistance of the government it would be helpful for them to earn income from it. In the case of migrant settlers, they had access to timely assistance from the Agriculture Department to select seeds, seek

technical support in terms of tools, and so on, but for the tribal communities, these support systems were no longer available because they did not possess land ownership records. Owing to these many reasons, the tribal women started to assimilate into new forms of livelihoods requiring unskilled labour.

#### **4.2.1.3.Land Degradation and Climate Change**

Since shifting cultivation is rain based, climate change has had a huge impact on the same. The migrant settlers used bore wells for irrigation, which affected the groundwater sources. In turn, this affected the tribal people's access to water for daily needs, apart from their irrigation needs. So, while cultivating cash crops, to irrigate the crops, rainwater was not enough, and they required irrigation sources. While irrigation was an obvious necessity to cultivate crops, it was especially expensive for the tribal people who lived on the hilly terrain, as they then had to dig bore wells for the same. There were some subsidies to dig bore wells in Kerala given by the panchayat on the basis of land ownership. However, the tribal people did not have any documents for their land, and so, the local government has not sanctioned borewell funds to the tribal people. The respondents raised complaints and demanded irrigation for their agriculture in the Gram Sabhas many times, but no adequate measures to facilitate drinking water and irrigation were implemented.

The Irula and Muduga respondents who have lands restarted shifting cultivation after realising that cash crop cultivation does not give much yield. The respondents said that the millet crops were not giving much yield due to the changes in the soil after the use of pesticides. Land degradation was a severe issue that the tribal communities are facing now. The fluctuating weather patterns and soil erosion made the land unsuitable for cultivation. The destruction of the vegetative cover of the

land took place during that time. Unplanned settlements gradually destroyed the forests and the biophysical settlements of the region. Natural resources were exploited by the settlers, and unscientific (modern) cultivation degraded the fertility of the soil due to the use of fertilisers. The Kurumbas informed that due to increased rain for the last few years millet crops are not growing. The respondents from the hamlets of Kadukamanna and Anavayi said the same and they also added that land erosion is also a reason for not doing shifting cultivation these days. It has been nearly five years since they stopped shifting cultivation. But, in the case of Irulas and Mudugas, they stopped shifting cultivation in the last two decades. It gradually led to unskilled labour, especially men who started to migrate to the other parts of Attappady and also outside of Attappady. It helps the tribal community to earn income but at the same time, it reduces the use of traditional livelihood patterns.

#### **4.2.1.4.State Interventions**

While looking at the agricultural changes among tribal communities it is found that the implementation of infrastructural projects brought many changes in the cultivation. Initially, they used to live in their field even though they had their own houses in the hamlet. With the implementation of the housing scheme, the tribal people started living in houses constructed in their hamlets. During the 1970s and 1980s, housing schemes were implemented so as to bring the tribal communities into a settlement pattern with houses and basic amenities. It affected the shifting cultivators who were relocated to the hamlets. Before living in the settlements, the respondents used to live in their own farmlands, as they had shifting cultivation. Along with the housing schemes, the government began to transplant the tribal children into pre-metric tribal hostels and Model Residential Schools in different parts of Kerala. These institutions of formal education were very different from the tribal

environment and their living conditions. The school curriculum, which was drawn up without any awareness of tribal traditions and living, made it difficult for these children to cope with mainstream education. Other than making them barely literate, the system made the tribal people unfamiliar with the habitat of their own community. The tribal people had to have knowledge of their sustainable ecology which was passed on from generation to generation to retain their traditional livelihood practices, which was lacking among the respondents in the age group of 18-25 years and 26-33 years since the women in these age groups studied in pre-matric hostels and residential schools. That is why the respondents from this age category prefer to do wage labour as it will help them to earn income. Women in the age group of above 45 years had the experience and knowledge of shifting cultivation, such as which crops to sow, in which season and which crops have to be harvested first. They preferred to go back to the shifting cultivation because they thought they could cultivate their staple food crops such as millets, pulses and cereals.

The integrated Tribal Development Project's (ITDP) intervention was crucial with regard to the traditional livelihoods of the respondents. As the tribal women lacked traditional livelihood sources, after they dropped out of school, the ITDP provided training for different projects to sustain their income. So, short-term skill development programmes such as tailoring, wax making, agarbatti making, weaving, etc. were deployed to the women. There were some drawbacks to the implementation of such skill training. First of all, the employment opportunities to utilise the skills provided were very less for the women in Attappady, especially as there was no cooperative society formed from the side of the ITDP for the beneficiaries to utilise such skills and earn from it. As Attappady was a rural area and the majority of the people residing here were from other social groups, the markets for tailoring, wax,

agarbatti etc. were not easily accessible to the tribal communities. Clearly, the initiatives ended with the skill training programmes and did not extend into assistance to negotiate the market.

Another reason that the respondents cited for the decline in agriculture was the restrictions by the Forest Department on cutting trees in the tribal land since the lands were still part of the forest. Therefore, due to the shade of the trees, the growth of the crops got affected. The Forest Department also restricted the community from burning the shrubs because of the risk of causing wildfire in the forests. Protection of the forests and the wildlife is necessary, but in the process, the subsistence of the tribal communities was seriously curtailed. Moreover, the tribal people did not exploit forests like other people who extracted timber and other natural resources for money from the forest. It is clearly visible in the traditional huts of the tribal people who used bamboo and grass to build their houses, because they did not want to exploit nature. Shifting cultivation is one such example here, because, at the beginning of shifting cultivation, it was important for the community to perform rituals to worship mother earth for good crops. After using the land for cultivation, the land was kept fallow for the next two-three years to restore its fertility for the next cultivation cycle, thus, the land was left to regain its vegetation and land cover (Chakravarthy 2012).

It is understood from the field narratives that projects implemented in Attappady were not aimed at a long-term impact on the community. The tribal activists Udayan and Marthan said that the government is claiming to have spent nearly one crore rupees on each tribal household in Attappady, however, the progress was not visible as the development schemes were not implemented properly. The AHADS project itself is an example of this, when the project was functional, it gave occupation to the tribal people to plant trees, conserve water bodies by constructing

check dams, construct intersections to the hamlets and also construct houses for the tribal communities. The intention behind providing these opportunities to the tribal communities might be to provide them with ‘income’. However, the tribal communities faced a shock in their livelihood and shifting cultivation after the closure of the programmes by AHADS in 2012. When they started to go for labour, it gradually affected their practice of cultivation.

The women were deprived of the necessary tools for the same, including transportation and the transaction costs of production and marketing of commodities. The respondents said that the Kudumbasree encouraged shifting cultivation and arranged for the collection of millet crops to be sold in the market with the Supply Co Department<sup>8</sup> to arrange food grains to the community kitchen. But it is identified that due to the irregularity in payments from the side of the Kudumbasree, the respondents stopped selling crops to them.

Here, the concerned department for ‘tribal development’ did not much emphasise the possibilities of such occupations in the rural tribal area. More than providing necessary income, these programmes deviated the tribal community from preserving their traditional livelihood patterns. This approach of livelihood dispossession of tribal women tried to fit the women into another mould which was difficult to sustain, and placed the respondents in a more vulnerable livelihood situation. From the field study, I observed that it was the Irulas and Mudugas who participated in these occupational training programmes rather than the Kurumbas, who could not do so because of the remoteness of their settlements. It was difficult for the Kurumba women to reach the training centres.

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<sup>8</sup> It is an execution section of the Department of Food and Civil Supplies of the Government of Kerala



#### **4.2.2. Women's Role in Agriculture**

The lack of land rights also affected the women's participation in agriculture, and the economic status and food security of the respondents. While tribal women used to be at the centre of food production earlier, the advent of cash crop cultivation took away their role in agriculture. Previously, tribal women did not possess land but played a role in the process of agriculture. Men and women together performed tasks such as cutting and burning of bushes, preparing the land, removing the weeds, guarding the field at night and harvesting. But, the post-harvest tasks such as processing, drying, grinding, storing the millets and the seeds were considered to be the domestic tasks that are sole responsibilities of women.

The women informed that they could no longer choose to participate in shifting cultivation also because they could not stay alone in the fields at night to protect the crop particularly when the land around is not being cultivated. Their land was covered with bushes and there were many wild animals too. It was not safe to stay there especially when their hamlets were far away from the farmland. Hence, it was convenient for them to go for unskilled labour than take up shifting cultivation.

Cash crop cultivation is market-oriented. Hence, men play a decisive role in choosing the crops, time and process of harvest and the market where the produce can be sold. This, in a sense, excluded women from agriculture and decision-making. They performed activities in agriculture like ploughing, sowing and irrigating the land, while the women removed the weeds from the field, gathered the seed during harvest and so on. The tribal men used these changes to assume control over the income and seclude women inside the households, they divided work according to their 'biological differences', where women are considered to be 'incapable' of

handling heavy labour. At the same time, apart from going for unskilled labour, the tribal women walk long distances with heavy loads of firewood and water from the forest on their head to cater to the entire family. These activities were normalised in the tribal community and the larger society as women's duties. Even though the labour was physically stressful for the tribal women and they worked harder than the men at these jobs, agricultural production was still gendered in favour of the men who controlled the resources (Krishna 2009). Here, the women's laborious physical activities in the households did not count as work as these are considered by the patriarchal structures as their service and duty towards the family. Bina Agarwal (2016) observes that the working hours of the women in a day are comparatively more than that of the men. They are immersed in domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, animal care, collection of minor forest products, fetching water and firewood, field labour etc. The gender shift in agricultural practices was caused by all the above factors apart from the migrant settler's interference. Although the tribal communities also followed some gender division in the utilisation of forest, especially hunting and collection of honey, which is considered as men's work even now, shifting cultivation was always considered a field of equal participation by men and women.

#### **4.3 Food Security**

The food patterns of the tribal people in Attappady were closely connected with their shifting cultivation. The Irulas cultivated varieties of food crops including millets, cereals, and pulses, and vegetables like yam, bottle gourd, ash gourd, and more than 25 varieties of leafy vegetables in the *panchakkadu* and forests. Therefore the tribal communities used to prepare different types of food with these food crops grown in their lands. *Ragi* (finger millet), *chama* (little millet) and *thena* (foxtail

millet) were used instead of rice. Rice was consumed rarely in a year; thus they consumed millets alone for the rest of the year. The respondents informed that they used to cultivate the food they needed and produce livestock for meat, and milk products. Thus they did not have to buy anything from outside except salt and dry fish. A large area of land used to be cultivated by the tribal people, but this decreased now due to several reasons, including land encroachment, as mentioned earlier.

There used to be many leafy vegetables available in those cultivated lands when there was shifting cultivation. These used to provide them with the necessary nutrition. It was the women who collected the leafy vegetables and tubers which were available in the forest near the hamlets. Women had regular interaction with forest as they used to go to graze animals and collect forest produce for sale. They also collected these leafy vegetables and tubers. Animal grazing time was a productive time for women as they simultaneously collected food products and firewood for cooking. Deforestation and restrictions by the forest officials from entering the existing forests have affected the tribal women's freedom of mobility to search for food, fodder and fuel. Women respondents from the Irula and Muduga communities informed that they have not been able to collect leafy vegetables and tubers from the forest for a long time now. Kurumba women only have the opportunity to collect such food products because their hamlets are in the forest. Tribal women had the task of finding food from the forests whereas the men sold the minor forest products for income (Krishna 2009). Hence, the women were more aware of the details such as which vegetable is available in the forest in which season, how to catch fish, where to find the tubers, when to collect medicinal plants and so on. For instance, women collected minor forest products such as bamboo shoots, mushrooms, medicinal plants like *nannari*, etc. during the rainy season because these were easily available during

that time. They served as their food during the lean season, and so, a decrease in such resources affected the food system of the tribal people. The decreasing availability of resources, particularly, food, put more pressure on the women to find ways to feed their children and family (Krishna 2009). A Muduga respondent, Maruthi, said that earlier there were wild animals that they used to hunt. They had wild tubers from the forest, now they do not have any meat or fish to give their children at least once a month. Now the health officials and ITDP are telling them why they are anaemic because our shifting cultivation stopped.

Another respondent from Nanjan, an *Ooru Mooppan* from Anakkatti hamlet said that the government wants to retain their shifting cultivation but where will they get water as there is no rain<sup>9</sup> and their land was getting dry and filled with bushes, a lot of elephants are there which destroy their land. The government is not addressing these problems for them, then how will they restart their shifting cultivation. They are not allowed to cut the trees on their land for cultivation; they do not have permission to hunt animals like they did earlier. They need the assurance to get all the help for agriculture and also need electric fences to prevent elephants from entering hamlets and their farmland. It is not only Nanjan's words, but all visited hamlets have given a similar response.

While looking at the food pattern of the three tribal communities there are some differences in the intake of food. The respondents from the Irula and Muduga communities have completely adapted the rice whereas the Kurumbas are having a mixed diet of rice, millets and vegetables. The Kurumbas are still able to produce food compared to the two other tribal communities. The respondents from Irulas and

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<sup>9</sup>This response was collected from the field before the climate change of excessive rainfall in Kerala that is before the flood 2018.

Mudugas informed that they have food only twice a day due to meagre income and scarcity of millets. Additionally, the increase in the price of vegetables and food grains has also affected the buying power of the tribal women. As the women prepared food for the household, the lack of adequate and healthy food primarily affected their own food security which led to nutritional deficiencies among the respondents.

#### **4.3.1. State Interventions for Food Security**

The state tried to combat this food shortage by providing rice and other food grains to the tribal community through many welfare programmes such as the Public Distribution System (PDS), and Community Kitchen by Kudumbasree, a National Rural Livelihood Mission at different points of time.

##### **4.3.1.1. The Public Distribution System**

The respondents informed that the quality of the rice distributed was rather low and was not satisfactory, but it was the only source where they could get subsidised food grains every month. They could not afford to buy food grains from the grocery shops due to their irregular and low incomes so there was no other option but to consume the subsidised food. It was also observed that the food grains received from the PDS were not sufficient to meet the needs of the whole family for a month. The state-run PDS replaced their millets and vegetables with rice and other food items. The communities' dependence on the PDS to alleviate the scarcity of food grains has not had a positive impact on their intake of healthy food. The subsidised food grains distributed through the PDS were of low quality. Sometimes, it was difficult to meet the needs of the whole family for a month with the food grains allotted by the government per household. Clearly, the state has been far from

concerned about the right to safe food and the health of these marginalised tribal communities. With their low income and the rising prices of food items, it was also difficult for them to buy rice and vegetables from other sources like grocery stores. The government introduced a substitute food system by distributing subsidised food grains through the public distribution system (PDS), and this introduced rice to the diet routine of the tribal communities. The respondents said that it was millets, and not rice, were their staple food in the past. Now, as they majorly consume the subsidised rice distributed by the PDS, the respondents were affected by various health issues, especially sickle cell anaemia which prevented them from doing strenuous work. It was diagnosed more among the respondents below the age of 40 years.

#### **4.3.1.2. Community Kitchen**

The implementation of community kitchens across the Attappady is due to infant mortality since 2013 to reduce the nutritional deficiency among the tribal women and children. Instead of supplying their traditional food grains through the PDS, the government implemented a subsidiary action in the form of the Community Kitchen run by the Kudumbasree to provide food for the women, elderly and children. The food served by the community kitchen included rice and some curries including green gram, dal, sambar and upma; the menu was decided by the Kudumbasree officials, and did not adhere to the traditional food patterns of tribal communities. There are many arguments coming from the respondents about the implementation of community kitchen. 43.39 per cent of women opposed the concept of shifting cultivation because the women said that it made them stand in queue for food in front of the government, instead of food they need for their agriculture to be restored. But, one older respondent said that it is helpful for her because as a widow and living alone

she does not have to work hard to earn and cook food. In many hamlets, irregularity in the functioning is observed, because sometimes the community kitchen stopped for several months due to lack of funds. Palani from Idavani and tribal activist KA Ramu said that there are still infant deaths happening in Attappady since the community kitchen started in Attappady, Hence, it does not have any impact on the food pattern of tribal communities in Attappady because it is serving rice instead of their staple food millets. There are food festivals organised by Kudumbasree in collaboration with NHGs in the project office of Kudumbasree and other events in other parts of Kerala to exhibit the food prepared by millet crops. The respondents informed that this is the only time that the food is prepared with millets; only rice is prepared the rest of the time in the community kitchen. The older respondents in the hamlets shared the view that this was not part of their culture, to be fed by the government, by putting no effort from their side. The tribal communities followed the custom of offering food to anyone who visited their huts, and instead, now they became dependent on the government to get their basic meals for the day.

The next chapter will discuss the occupation, education and healthcare of the respondents which is connected to land, agriculture and food security of the respondents. Land dispossession is identified as one of the major reasons for the changing livelihood sources of tribal communities. In the light of this, it is important to understand how tribal people have been accepting and adapting to unskilled labour and the wage work provided by the government schemes.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Education, Employment and Health**

#### **Introduction**

Formal education plays an important role in the well-being of a community. It determines the socio-economic conditions of a community, as there is a strong connection between education and economic status. Formal education has a positive impact on one's occupational status, economic conditions, mortality, hygiene, health, and the well-being of the family. So that this chapter is exploring how the education of tribal women brings them to come forward and how it helped them to find work.

#### **5.1 Education of the Respondents**

A formal school education values the provision of equal educational opportunities, developing skills and a questioning mind, leading to improved living conditions. In this way, education for the tribal community is meant to enable the people to participate in the new avenues of the economy and get new jobs (Kamat 1981). In this context, one has to discuss the need for inclusive education for the tribal people and how far a formal school education can facilitate socio-economic stability for them. However, the literacy rate of the tribal population is comparatively lower than that of other communities in Kerala. As per the findings of the field study, the education levels of tribal communities are between first standard and higher secondary school. No respondent beyond this level of formal education was found during the fieldwork. It has already been mentioned in chapter two that the male and female literacy among tribal people is 64 and 56 per cent respectively. The basic aim of formal education is to increase the literacy of the tribal community through the



Saksharatha Mission (literacy mission) by the policy-makers, where respondents who did not attend formal schools got the opportunity to learn through the literacy mission.

### **5.1.1. Impact of Formal Education on the Traditional Knowledge**

As there was a decline in farmlands, the government implemented some schemes to provide housing, hostel education, etc. with less awareness about the ecology and environment of the tribal community. It was found that, along with the infrastructural developments in tribal hamlets, the government began to shift the tribal children to Model Residential schools, pre-matric hostels and post-matric hostels in different parts of Kerala. The methods and practices of formal education were quite different from the environment and living conditions of the Kurumbas. Among the interviewed respondents, the higher secondary was the highest level of formal education that they had attained; it was mostly the respondents in the age group of 18-25 who got the opportunity to study in hostels. Living in hostels for formal school education also affected the respondents' connection with their ecosystem and community relations, and their cultural ways of living. C.K. Janu's *Mother Forest* discusses the ways in which hostel education affects the tribal children and their re-adaptation to their community after leaving the school. One important factor here that affects this readjustment is their lack of awareness about traditional livelihoods because of their mainstream education, which mostly forced many to stay away from their traditional cultivation practices and take up unskilled labour. 24.52 per cent of women from Irula and Muduga communities informed that they returned to their communities after the school education or after dropping out of school. But they were not much aware of their natural ecosystem and the means of subsistence for the tribal community. This was especially so among the respondents in the age group of 18-25 and 26-33; they had less knowledge about shifting cultivation, catching fish from the

rivers, climbing the hills and trees, making food with millets and also had no time to go to the forests to collect medicinal plants and edible roots as their mothers and grandmothers did. The indigenous knowledge systems such as shifting cultivation, thrashing and grinding of millet crops, and the seasons to identify the herbs, roots, medicinal plants and food from the forest were passed on from generation to generation. But there is a contradiction that tribal women in the age category from the Kurumba community are having that knowledge nowadays also because there is less intervention from the other social groups and also due to lack of any other opportunities Kurumbas are giving importance to shifting cultivation and minor forest produces.

In the mainstream education system, tribal people could not attain such information. The information obtained through the school curriculum about tribal culture was different from the actual lives of the tribal community; there was not much included about the tribal culture in the mainstream education, to begin with, while it included the history, culture, songs, poems and stories to represent the mainstream society. There is also another reason that the implementation of AHADS, while they are back to hamlets from hostel education, was a transition time of traditional livelihoods to government intervention livelihood patterns thus the respondents started to depend on it.

The older respondents also said that younger women now have an opportunity to get an education. During their time, there were no schools and so they could not get an education and spent all their time on farmland. They were scared of migrant settlers during that time, now the situation changed because their children got an education and it enabled them to mingle in society easily.

### **5.1.2. Education of the Children of the Respondents**

The Kurumba children were sent to the Model Residential Schools from the 1<sup>st</sup> standard or primary level. From then on, the children lived in residential schools till they turned fourteen or fifteen years of age. The children did not have permission to go home during these times except for Onam and Christmas holidays, and their summer vacation. During vacation, when the children returned to their hamlets, they were hesitant to go back to the hostels. The respondents informed that while the children started to study in the model residential schools, especially outside Attappady, they showed a lack of interest to live away from their family and the hamlet due to multiple reasons; hence the majority of the children left the hostels and ran back to their own hamlets. If the MRS, Pre-Matric Hostels and Post-Matric Hostels were shifted near to their villages, the tribal children could study without losing touch with their environment and grow up with an awareness of their culture and livelihood systems.

The access to school was more of a challenge for the three tribal communities but there is disparity in it based on the geographical location of the hamlets. While some hamlets of Irulas Mudugas are easily accessible by road connectivity to reach schools, the hamlets of Kurumbas still need to depend on hostels for formal education. Though there were residential schools, the number of tribal children who dropped out of school has still not decreased even today. The respondents informed that there were multiple reasons identified for the children's reluctance to go to school including poor health in childhood, financial instability in the family, lack of schools nearby their hamlet and the lack of transport facilities to reach schools. If the children fell sick, they would not be sent to school again as the parents get anxious about it. During fieldwork, it was observed that the children also left hostels once they were

affected by a disease or infection from the hostel; this also shows the poor condition of the facilities in hostels. Most of them had poor access to medical services which made many diseases incurable. The inadequate transport facilities to reach the schools which otherwise could only be reached by foot made many parents hesitant to send their children there.

With regards to the transport issues, the Kurumbas from Idavani, Murukala and Kadukamanna have to cross the river to go outside the forest. During the monsoon, it is difficult for the hamlet dwellers to cross the river since there is no permanent bridge across the river. Respondents from Idavani hamlet said that their children could not join the school in time for admission at the higher secondary level due to flooding in the river in June. As for the way by land, it is difficult for vehicles to navigate the slippery hills of Idavani, so the residents had to walk to get anywhere. Nowadays, the respondents' children study in model residential schools in different parts of Kerala.

The formal education is free and compulsory in Kerala. Hence, there is no tuition and hostel fees for the tribal children studying in model residential schools and staying in hostels. However, the financial instability of the family is still an impediment to the respondents' children in their path towards education. The families had many expenses but with very little income. Though the major occupation of the tribal communities was agriculture, the income from agriculture is so low that it barely helps in their subsistence. So, it is difficult for the respondents to meet the other expenses of education for their children. Thus, the income of a family was a determining component in their children's education. Income from NREGA and the collection of non-timber forest products were the other sources of income for the respondents, but these were also not sufficient. The lack of a regular income from

other sources affected the education of the whole community. It was found that the funds and grants provided by the Tribal Sub Plan, scholarships, etc. were not enough to bridge this gap. The cost of travel to hostels and back, the clothes and food for the family, etc. could not be met with this amount. On the other hand, when the household lacks sufficient income for survival, sometimes the respondents need to utilise the scholarship amount of children.

The teachers in the schools do not help in any way to reduce the dropout of children from the tribal communities. The lack of proper guidance from the school teachers and ST promoters is a major reason for these children to discontinue their studies after the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, or the higher secondary school level. So, the children were less aware of, and unable to achieve, the fruits of higher education. The respondents added that the children who studied in hostels moved with tribal children only, and faced problems in interacting with children from other social groups when they went to college.

The decentralised admission process for schools and colleges in Kerala did not help in any way here. There are only three government higher secondary schools in Attappady, and when the children apply for admission in those schools, only a few get admitted here. There is a Government Arts and Science College in Attappady but the tribal children rarely get admission to the college through the decentralised admission process in Kerala. Even though the government had earlier promised to give the native tribal children preference in the college in the reservation of Scheduled Tribes, this was not followed in Attappady. It is the denial of the right of tribal children to study in their native place. It is observed that because of the discrimination by the teachers and hostel officials the parents prefer to send their children to private schools these days.

It is observed that the ITDP and KILA (Kerala Institute of Local Administration) provide skill training for the dropped out children in plumbing, auto mechanics and some home science courses to help them acquire a job. It was found from the response of the respondents that there are fewer opportunities for the tribal communities in this sector because of the remote location of Attappady.

It was found that one Model Residential School for tribal children from remote areas, sixteen pre-matric hostels, one Higher Secondary School per each panchayat of Attappady block; four Government Lower Primary Schools, one Government Upper Primary School, and one Tribal High School functioned in Attappady.

## **5.2 Employment of the Respondents**

The economy of the tribal communities in Attappady was closely linked to nature. They engaged in traditional occupations such as shifting cultivation, animal husbandry, and other forest-based livelihoods. However, the tribal communities do not get enough income from agriculture in a whole year because the production is consumption-oriented so their income is supplemented by gathering forest products, hunting and fishing (Mahanti 1994).

As said already in chapter three, when the tribal women's access to shifting cultivation and minor forest products got restricted due to agricultural degradation and deforestation, the women had to go out for work to sustain their livelihoods and households. The temporary migration of tribal men also affected the work patterns of the tribal women. When the men migrated out of the hamlets, it led to an increase in the tribal women's work burden especially as the women became responsible to rear children; it affected the balance of labour and household chores as the women lived alone with their children.

Attappady has predominantly been a tribal region since the late 1950s, but now the tribal population constitutes only forty per cent of the total population and the rest of them were from other social groups. So, the possibility of getting any kind of work was low since the majority of other social groups also preferred unskilled labour, hindering the participation of the tribal people, especially women.

When shifting cultivation was affected by many changes brought about by the various welfare programmes implemented in Attappady, the tribal communities faced difficulties in coping with a market-oriented way of life where the people needed to find money for everything in their day-to-day life, it led to finding income to live rather than depend on traditional livelihoods. Purushothaman (2005) discusses how the independent economy of the tribal communities was destroyed due to the various development programmes. Attappady is a vital example here when discussing development programmes such as AHADS, NREGA, and Kudumbasree, which made the community lose their self-reliance and depend on the welfare programmes.

For the tribal women because of their less formal education qualifications, unskilled labour is the only option to work on. The following section is discussing the current source of occupation of the respondents.

### **5.2.1. Agriculture and Agricultural Labour**

There are 18.86 households that are having cultivation these days. These households are doing a mix of cash crops and millet crops in cultivation. Women cultivators are less among them, that is there are only 6.52 respondents practising cultivation these days. It is already mentioned in the previous chapter that Kurumbas are more engaged with cultivation than the other two tribal communities. When asked about agriculture the respondents said that wild animals are destroying the crops so

nothing is getting in it so it is better to go for any other work than doing agriculture. Climate change is also one of the reasons for this. A respondent said that last year they prepared land for cultivation in April but in the middle of cleaning the land by cutting the bushes, rain started and they had to leave the land. After a few days they resumed clearing the land, but due to rain it took a longer time to prepare the land. So, they could not sow seeds on time and hence there was no good yield that year. As a result, they did not take up cultivation after that. The respondents also said that they prefer NREGA because it provides them income.

15.84 per cent of the respondents depend on agricultural labour for their livelihood. These respondents are from the Irula and Muduga communities. Among the majority are from the Muduga community, 12.83 per cent of respondents are from Muduga community and 3.01 per cent are from Irula community. The lands those respondents are going for agricultural labour was once their land, which were invaded by migrant settlers. Mudugas hamlets are surrounded by other social groups' settlements that is why there are more opportunities for agricultural labour especially to pluck the ginger and turmeric, gather the areca nut, and so on are the major work they do for the wage of 350 rupees. The respondents said that sometimes they are going to Attappady farming society also for agriculture labour according to the season. The respondents also added that they are not going to the Attappady farming society every year, because it is not open to every tribal people at all times because it depends on the demand for labour. In the case of the Irula community, there are less opportunities compared to Mudugas. The respondents from the hamlets of Anakkatti, Vadakottathara, Pudur, Paloor and Vattlakki OLH are not going to agriculture labour. It depends on the location of the hamlets. There are some hamlets surrounded with only plain lands of forest and remote from all the access such as transport, markets,



hospitals and also occupation. The Kurumba hamlets also have the same situation because those hamlets are surrounded by forest, that is also a reason that Kurumbas are still following agriculture.

### **5.2.2.National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)**

There was no free mobility for the tribal women even though the majority of the welfare programmes were women-centric that is why women prefer to work near their hamlet, which is why it is convenient for women to go for wage labour with NREGA. When I asked about the migration to other parts of Attappady in search of occupation, the respondents informed that they are not comfortable leaving their hamlet because of the household responsibility. 70.56 per cent of respondents are depending on NREGA as a means of occupation. The major reason for the larger dependency on NREGA is due to scarcity of other opportunities for the respondents in Attappady. So, they largely relied upon the 200 days of wage labour given by the NREGA because the other occupations such as agriculture, animal husbandry, and the collection of minor forest products were all seasonal.

The work assigned by the panchayats through NREGA include the construction of check dams, stone edges for streams and rivers, digging of ponds for wild animals, cleaning and cutting the bushes along the roadsides, and marking forest boundaries. While the men could go for work outside their villages in the construction sector, driving, agriculture, labour in coffee estates, wage labour, and construction of forest boundaries, the tribal women managed their household responsibilities with the income from NREGA, especially as they did not have to go out for their work. However, if there was any job available in the neighbouring farmlands belonging to other social groups, the tribal women would go there also. The respondents also added

that those who went for construction work and some as low-paid agricultural labourers in the lands of people from other social groups. Later on, when NREGA was implemented in Attappady, wage labour provided by the programme became the primary source of income for the Irula tribal women for over a decade.

There are positive and negative impacts of NREGA on the respondents. It is helpful for women as they could work close to their hamlet and did not need to go far in search of work. Thus, in order to reach home every day, the women preferred the NREGA as a convenient source of work. Through my interaction with the respondents, I got to know that the women were majorly participating in the programme since they consider it not very strenuous for them. It is especially the older respondents that are unable to find any other occupation that is comfortable to go there because the supervisors are flexible with them. But, some women listed many reasons for not participating in NREGA also, the long distance from the hamlets to the NREGA worksite was the biggest hurdle for the respondents here. Usually, the women had to walk a long distance to reach the worksite; sometimes, it was in the innermost areas of the forest. This resulted in the women arriving late, sometimes at the workplace, when the supervisor would mark them absent.

The respondents also added that their worksites for wage labour were allotted by the panchayat officials so the tribal people did not have the choice to find their place of work. Therefore, the implementation process was not inclusive. That is why wage labour for the tribal communities was given mostly inside the forest-to construct check dams, build stone bridges to cross the river, clear the bushes of roads, dig ponds for the animals etc. It was found that the handmade check dams and bridges were, however, not resistant to natural calamities because these are selected by the panchayat officials. The respondents also said that people from other social groups

had the choice to find their workplace for wage labour and even had the choice to take work in their own farmland, which was denied to the tribal people.

Many studies are available in India linking the socio-economic ‘empowerment’ of rural women to the NREGA. However, in my study, it was found that the income from this programme did not reach the tribal women regularly. Women said that it took three to six months for them to get their income for at least one *muster roll*<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, the women faced difficulty in meeting the household expenses; many are constantly indebted to their local shopkeepers for buying food grains. The NREGA claims that it ensures supplementary livelihood in rural areas by providing unskilled manual work. Certain categories of work like water conservation, drought proofing, irrigation, land development, rejuvenation of traditional water bodies, flood control and drainage work, rural activity and work on the lands of SC/ST/BPL/IAAY beneficiaries/individual small and marginal farmers, etc. are taken up for providing employment to the job-seeking rural households (Beniwal 2015). In the case of Attappady, the above-mentioned jobs were not implemented for the tribal communities. The respondents preferred to get wage labour in their own farmland, so it would be possible for them to go back to shifting cultivation and produce their traditional staple food crops.

The findings of a study conducted by Breitzkreuz (2017) concluded that the NREGA has had a positive effect on tribal women when it comes to income. In the case of the tribal women in Attappady, it has not been very effective in ensuring their financial stability. The respondents said that even though the programme assured 200

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<sup>10</sup>A “muster roll” is essentially a labour attendance register, pertaining to a particular worksite in a particular period (say, two weeks). It is also used as a receipt to claim funds from the Programme Officer for the payment of wages. Typically, the completion of a particular work would involve several muster rolls (G.O.I. 2007). In Attappady, the 200 days of work are divided into several muster rolls, where one muster roll is six days.

days of wage labour, the maximum number of days that they would get was 50 to 60 days in a year. It was understood from the responses of the women that the panchayats also lagged behind in sanctioning the orders of the worksites where the tribal members were allotted. This inadequate functioning of the panchayats also made it challenging for the respondents to commit to any other labour outside the NREGA.

### **5.2.3. Other Unskilled Labour**

There is 1.13 per cent of respondents who work in construction labour in the Irula community. They are work for the house construction in tribal hamlets when there is no work available in NREGA. 2.64 per cent of respondents are going to brick kilns in the bordering region of Tadakam in Tamil Nadu. These respondents prefer to go to brick kilns when there is no wage labour available in NREGA. The respondents from Nallashinka, Vadakottathara and Vattlakki OLH were going to brick kilns earlier. But, when NREGA started functioning in Attappady, women preferred to work for it because it gave them more income than the work in brick kilns. They added that the labour in brick kiln causes for many health issues to them especially lower back pain.

### **5.2.4. Collection of Minor Forest Produces**

Along with shifting cultivation, forest was one of the important livelihood sources for tribal communities in Attappady. The degradation of the forest affected the economy of the tribal communities especially for the Irula and Muduga communities and it caused a certain level of income depletion among the respondents. Earlier, the respondents collected minor forest produce and sold them to the Co-operative society. The tribal community could not sell these products in the markets inside or outside Attappady except in this cooperative society as they were from the

forests. This was the main reason found for the non-participation of tribal women in the collection of minor forest products these days. Only 4.15 per cent of respondents are dependent on forest for income. Kurumbas especially are more dependent on it. Deforestation and increasing distance to forest are some of the factors that respondents from Irula and Muduga communities informed as the reason for their not going to collect minor forest produce. The respondents said that minor forest producers were the primary source of income for them while shifting cultivation was the main source for food. Nowadays the relationship with forest for Irula and Muduga women is only for firewood collection and animal grazing.

As Tharakan (2003) points out, the Kurumbas relied on the forest allied resources as a means of income, but nowadays, the Kurumbas were less dependent on them because they also did not have the permission to sell the forest products directly outside Attappady, as the forest resources were owned by the state. The Tribal people have permission only to minor forest products in the Kurumba Girijan Co-operative Society under the state government. It was found that the long distance to the co-operative society discouraged the respondents from going there, but the respondents added that they still sold things during emergencies when they ran short of money. It was also found that the respondents preferred wage labour from NREGA rather than to the collection of minor forest products because NREGA is assured 200 days of work. The minor forest produce collection is a time taking process. For instance, the collection of *Chunda* became five kilogram after it dried but if the respondents went to collect minor forest products for that price they got only thousand rupees. The respondents said that it took them time to collect roots and plants from the forest, for which the cooperative society did not pay much, so it would have been helpful if the Kurumbas were permitted to directly sell.

With the implementation of Forest Regulations which restricted the entry of tribal groups into forests, there was a drastic decrease in the Kurumba women's dependence on the forest as a means of livelihood. The respondents said that all of them had the licence card to collect minor forest products but they were not doing that since it was time-consuming with less income. But the Kurumba women from Idavani hamlet said they are still relying on it because they sell it to one other social group man that he is coming to directly collect from the women. The respondents said that the cooperative society is far from the hamlet; so they have two options to reach there one is to walk through forest or to travel for nearly 25 kilometres to reach there. So that they prefer to give than man because he used to regularly visit the hamlet to collect these products. This non-tribal man has a licence card to give minor forest products to the cooperative society.

#### **5.2.5. Umbrella Making**

7.54 per cent of women work in umbrella making in an NGO which is functioning for the education and livelihood of tribal communities in Attappady. The work for umbrellas is seasonal; it depends on the rainy season. The respondents informed that they do not work for it every year, it depends on their time availability to come into the NGO for work. The respondents said that sometimes they used to not go for it due to multiple reasons such as health problems, house construction and so on.

#### **5.2.6. Animal Husbandry**

The animal husbandry as an occupation has reduced among the tribal communities. Only four women did it as a source of income. The Irula households used to keep goats as a symbol of their status. Each tribal household used to keep a

few goats with them until a few decades back (AD and Kurian 2016). Nowadays, very few households keep goats as a means of income and, moreover, only two or three goats in a household. Only 20 per cent of respondents are having animal husbandry these days. One of the main reasons women cited for not keeping animals was that the land which was once used to graze animals was not accessible anymore because those lands are encroached by the migrant settlers. When their landholdings shifted to the hands of other social groups, the tribal communities did not have enough grazing land. So, they could no longer keep the animals nor sell them in exchange for essential commodities like they used to, and all this led to major lifestyle changes for the Irulas and Mudugas especially.

During the period of the AHADS project, the officials restricted the tribal people from bringing animals for grazing near the forests to protect the saplings that were planted to restore the Attappady valley. What the state considered as biodiversity conservation, in fact, restricted the tribal people from practising their traditional and eco-friendly livelihoods. The women also faced difficulty in nurturing them because of their lack of time. The respondents said that the Kudumbasree provided goats to the tribal women of NHGs on loan but due to the lack of time and money, many could not buy them. There were some respondents who bought the goats from Kudumbasree, but their animals did not survive for long. It was also found that the funds sanctioned for the tribal communities were not utilised adequately by the Kudumbasree because they did not follow-up on them after their implementation.

The older women respondents said that they used to have enough goats and cows at home when they were younger which provided them milk, curd and meat, but nowadays, there were few animals in the households, which reduced the consumption of such dairy products. The difficulty to sell animals in the market in

present times also was a reason to not keep animals, as the respondents could not get a fair price for their goats from the buyers from outside Attappady, especially people from non-tribal communities.

Unlike the other two tribal communities, the Kurumbas still kept domestic animals. This ensured that the women got a small amount of income by selling the animals; however, it was found that the respondents could not sell milk easily because of their location inside the forests. While there were dairy outlets to collect milk from the farmers in Attappady, Kurumbas were far away from their hamlets. There was no arrangement in place to collect the milk directly from the farmers, even when the respondents preferred to keep cows. Kurumba women have the possibility of animal grazing but they could not have the possibility to sell milk outside or inside but still they are keeping animals to sell them during the lean season. The other two tribal communities could not have the space for animal graze that is why they are not keeping it though there is a possibility to sell milk in dairy outlets.

In the olden days, there were many households which kept cows when they lived on their own agricultural land. The respondents said that they used to keep animals in their farmlands during that time, day and night so that they utilised the cow dung as manure for the crops. There was no practice to keep animals in cattle hearth, they usually keep the animals tied on the farmland. Now, because they lived in the hamlets, there was a limitation of space to keep cattle because of the clustered form of hamlet. It is important to consider the necessary requirements of tribal communities while forming a hamlet from the side of the government, but instead of providing houses to tribal communities these welfare policies never considered their needs, especially the purpose of livestock and cattle for tribal communities are ignored by the government.



The respondents also said that it is comfortable to keep animals in hamlets but there is no one else to graze animals. It is required to take goats to graze in the afternoon so that while going to any other occupation some time they could not take animals to graze. The gendered division of labour traditionally places the responsibility of taking care of the animals on the women, in addition to their multiple household chores. The changing livelihood patterns and increased responsibilities of the women made it difficult for them to keep the animals. It was also difficult to find sufficient grazing grounds for the animals in the forests or the hamlets as the land near the hamlets mostly belonged to other social groups who did not give them permission to graze the animals, as it affected their crops. Even as the tribal women were segregated from household agriculture and lacked the resources to rear cattle, the women still had to be the primary earners in the absence of participation by the men in the household.

### **5.3 Income of the Respondents**

As the majority of the occupations that the women were engaged in were seasonal, it was difficult to estimate the annual income of the respondents. For instance, the respondents who participated in the NREGA also used to go for construction work or other wage labour when these were available. In some situations, the respondents did not go for NREGA labour because the construction work was more profitable than the former. The time taken to approve the job cards from the gram panchayat was also a reason for that. The officials did not give approval to all the applications for job cards every year, so the respondents would remain unemployed for that year. Since there were less opportunities, getting any other work was also difficult for the respondents. In NREGA, they received a wage of Rs. 263 per day, so the annual income of a household should be Rs.52,600 (for 200 days of

work) as per the existing programme. The respondents, however, received only 50 days of work or so in a year.

Once animal husbandry was one of the income because it gave them annual income as said about it in the earlier chapter. Some respondents had sold cattle to earn money, sometimes once in a year or in alternative years, so it was difficult to estimate their annual income from that as well. When the Block Panchayat distributed cattle to the Kurumba women to earn an income by selling milk, most of the cattle were sold off after a few days of receiving them due to the financial deprivation of the respondents. This reflects the financial instability that the tribal women suffered from. In my interactions, I could understand that it was more profitable for them to sell off their cattle to manage their daily expenses for at least a few months because they simply had to make use of every economic opportunity they got to overcome their acute shortage of money.

One of the major expenses for the respondents was the transport cost to reach the markets, hospitals, ITDP and the local self-government offices and other departments. The differences among the three tribal communities, especially Kurumbas, are more due to the remoteness of the Kurumba hamlets. The Kurumbas depended on jeeps and auto-rickshaws as their means of transport since there was no public transport. The respondents informed that they had to come out of the hamlet on an everyday basis to fulfil their needs. It was observed that there was no Family Health Centre (FHC) near any of the Kurumba hamlets I visited. So, the tribal people had to go to Mukali, Goolikadavu, Agali or Kottathara to avail healthcare facilities. The respondents added that it would cost them as much as five to six hundred rupees to rent a jeep per visit. This varied according to the distance of travel outside the hamlet.

Since the income was not even sufficient to meet their daily needs and household expenditure, the weekly thrift from micro-credit programmes like Kudumbasree (under the National Rural Livelihood Mission) became overburdening for the respondents. When asked about it, the respondents said who will repay the money after the loan is sanctioned because we do not have any regular income. Kudumbasree implemented programmes like Joint Liability Group Farming, Milk production Function, etc. for other social groups in Kerala, but the Tribal Special project of Kudumbasree in Attappady did not encourage such livelihood activities and agriculture for the tribal women. As domesticating of animals was a part of tribal livelihoods, the programme has to give emphasis on such initiatives like animal husbandry. Apart from that, Kudumbasree concentrated on the Community Kitchen to distribute food for each tribal hamlet in Attappady.

#### **5.4 Healthcare Facilities**

There are three Family Health Centres (FHC) and 28 sub-centres are distributed in the three panchayats of Attappady; there is one Community Health Centre (CHC) in Agali, one Government Tribal Specialty Hospital with 54 beds in Kottathara and 28 sub-centres elsewhere. Three mobile health units provide healthcare assistance in the hamlets on a monthly basis for the elderly and pregnant women. Around 85 ASHA workers were appointed for the daily monitoring and distribution of essential medicines. Though healthcare facilities are to be provided free of cost for the tribal people, doctors are absent in Attappady. It is difficult for the tribal people to reach hospitals in emergency situations due to inadequate road connectivity in the hamlets. This majorly affected the Kurumbas since they lived inside the forest. Hamlets like Galazy, Mele Thudukki, Thudukki Ooradam, Mele

Moolakombu, Murukala and Kinattikkara did not have road connectivity to reach hospitals, and travelling by vehicles there was also not possible.

While discussing the health condition of the tribal women, it is significant to look at the resources that the respondents use, such as drinking water, food, living environment and sanitation facilities. The respondents did not have access to safe drinking water since it was only provided by the water distribution system of the local self-government, which caused many health problems to the women, adolescent girls and children. The tribal community used to produce their own food, but it was no longer possible today because of lack of land. So, the respondents had to depend on the subsidised rice supplied by the PDS because this was their only source of food these days even though it was unhealthy. The respondents complained that they did not get good-quality rice; most of the time they found bugs and fungi in them. The respondents also pointed out that, when they used to eat their traditional foods like *ragi* and *chama*, the tribal women never had any health problems and they were never in need of any hospital- *“now, we are all going to hospitals and we are not able to bear the expenses to deal with our health problems.”*

Apart from that, a survey conducted by the Agali Community Health Centre and five primary health centres found that 1,253 tribal people were affected by sickle cell anaemia. The tribal people face marginalisation in healthcare even though there are many healthcare institutions functioning there. Their shift from traditional healing practices to modern healthcare facilities is one of the basic elements of this marginalisation. In every hamlet, there used to be traditional healers but they are not much visible these days. Nowadays, the traditional healer's healthcare services are more utilised by other social groups from different parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. It is not the formal education that can educate tribal communities for better healthy

living conditions. There was an indigenous system that balanced their healthy lifestyle which they acquired over the generations. This is how the respondents said that during our time there was no more health issue than fever, because we ate healthy and worked harder. The older respondents in the field attributed the reasons for these issues, particularly among the younger women, to the disappearance of their traditional foods from their diets, and the changing work habits here, along with the dependence of the communities on modern medicine, instead of traditional medicine.

When the low intake of nutritious food was combined with strenuous labour, it gave rise to nutritional deficiencies and health problems for the women. Irula women suffered from reproductive health problems and were underweight. Women had muscle and joint aches and there were more incidences of sickle cell anaemia among the tribal women. The children were also deficient and underweight. Even when Kerala achieved the highest scores of the Human Development Index in India, the tribal people of Attappady are struggling to find safe food and stay healthy.

Many of the Kurumba tribal hamlets were in isolated and remote areas, so they had less accessibility to hospitals, the major reason being the lack of frequent public transport and the high cost of availing private vehicles. The health professionals and project officers of Attappady shared the opinion that the tribal people were hesitant to visit the hospitals, and that the basic reasons for their health issues were the continuous consumption of alcohol, betel leaves and so on. It is important to note that the opinion of the officials here is not based on any inquiry into the root cause of the tribal people's issues or their hesitancy to come into these hospitals. In my interaction with the respondents, I understood that the respondents preferred to go to private hospitals rather than government hospitals due to the treatment they received from the government hospitals. There were not many regular doctors in the Government Tribal

Specialty Hospital, which was why, at the time of emergencies, the hospital authorities referred them to hospitals outside Attappady like the Thrissur Medical College, Perinthalmanna Co-operative hospital or hospitals in Coimbatore.

The respondents of Idavani hamlet narrated some of the incidents in which a respondent fractured her leg and called for an ambulance from the Government Tribal Specialty Hospital, and the hospital officials said that Ambulance was under maintenance, so it was not possible for them to bring the patient to the hospital. There were three ambulances in the hospital, and the hospital officials claimed that all three were under repair at the same time. The hamlet dwellers had to hang the lady on a wooden stick and carry her to the hospital on their shoulders, and they were denied treatment saying that the doctor was absent; they had to move to Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu for her treatment. This is not peculiar to Idavani. There were many other such cases emerged in Kurumba hamlets like Ooradam, Galazy, Mele Thudukki, Thudukki, Kadukamanna, Murukala and Kinattikkara which were located in the more interior parts of the forest than Idavani, where both public transport and private vehicles like jeeps and auto-rickshaws could not reach. With the network issues in the forest, it was almost impossible for the hamlet dwellers to contact the hospitals during emergency situations. The accessibility to FHCs and Government Tribal Specialty hospital was quite difficult for the Kurumbas because of their distance and the road connectivity.

In the case of tribal communities, and particularly the women, apart from a balanced and nutritious intake of food and safe drinking water, financial stability and self-sufficient agriculture are also essential for better health and physical well-being. The tribal women had to spend much of their time in household chores especially strenuous work like cleaning, fetching water and collecting firewood and carrying

them on head for kilometres of distance twice or more in a day, cooking in badly-ventilated kitchens, apart from frequent pregnancies and lactation, etc., all the while consuming less nutrition and sometimes even skipping meals to save time and food for the family. The vulnerability and health risks of the tribal women were the highest compared to other social groups or even members of the same community due to lack of nutrition, financial stability and access to resources, including proper healthcare.

The next chapter consists of case studies from the field to understand the concerns of the respondents in their own voices.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Case Studies**

This chapter consists of case studies from the field in order to understand the concerns of the respondents in their own voices. The case studies engage with the loss of land, livelihood, resources and autonomy. They also engage with the tribal women's response and reception of the welfare programmes that were introduced by the government in the name of welfare and development. The case studies included in this chapter are of the tribal women from the field of research but of different age groups, hamlets and regions of Attappady. The fourteen case studies that constitute this chapter reflect on their past, present and concern for the future. They extensively address the question of change in their lives consequent to their loss of land, shifting agriculture, indigenous knowledge systems and habitats.

#### **Case Study– 1**

**Name: Marri**

**Hamlet: Anakkatti**

Marri is an Irula woman who lives in Anakkatti hamlet. She is 55 years old. She had two children, one son and one daughter but her daughter passed away. She studied up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> standard. She said that she was scared of wild animals while going to school. That is why she stopped going to school. She stayed with her parents on their farmland. After her parents' death, she started to live with her grandparents when she was twelve years old. Her parents did farming till their death. Her father had 12 acres of land, which was kept fallow for many years. Now she and her siblings are going to resume shifting cultivation on the land after they realised the importance of



millet food. Her parents died due to lack of healthcare facilities during that time. She did not remember what her parents' disease was. When she was with her grandparents, her maternal uncle raped her when she was sixteen years old, and later she was married to that person. Her husband died due to Tuberculosis in 1996. Later she brought up children by herself. However, she could not send them to school due to her poor financial condition. Her son studied up to the 4<sup>th</sup> standard. She fell sick working in brick kilns and she quit the job five years ago. Now, she is working with NREGA as it is the only source of income. She has livestock also, she used to sell animals during the lean time. Before working in NREGA, she was going for brick kilns in Tamil Nadu. She got a house sanctioned by IAY in 2013, but the construction has not been completed, as the money is not sanctioned by the government. She did not get any answer when she enquired with the Tribal Extension Officer in ITDP. Her income is so low that she could not complete the construction of the house on her own. Now she is living in a water pump house along with her brother.

## **Case Study – 2**

**Name: Rami**

**Hamlet: Anakkatti**

Rami is an Irula woman who lives in Anakkatti hamlet. She is 44 years old and works as a supervisor in NREGA. She got married when she was 20 year old. Her husband worked as an unskilled labourer. She has two children studying in a pre-metric hostel in Agali. She stayed in a hostel and completed her SSLC in 1988. She couldn't go for further studies because of financial problems in the family. Her family did shifting cultivation in her childhood. They had income from cattle as well. Her parents have land but it has not been distributed to her. Because of her education she

got a permanent job in ICDS as an Anganwadi helper. She lost her job after delivery of her first child. There was no maternity leave and she did not know how to save her job during that time. Her husband died due to an accident seven years after they got married. After that because of the grief of her husband's death she lost confidence to leave the house, so she stayed in the house without going for any other job. Now she is working as a supervisor in NREGA. Recently with the help of an NGO she tried to get temporary work as an ICDS helper. She did an RTI and got to know that there were vacancies. She followed the legal procedure to get that job with the help of the NGO. But, after the interview, this position was given to a woman of another social group. The government is ignoring tribal people for the temporary posts even though there are reservations for the tribal people. They did not get information if they directly went to ITDP. They had to file an RTI to get information about government affairs especially for information about land, electricity, house etc. Once they got the information, they went on protest and then notification will be released by the concerned officials. However, the position will be filled mostly with non-tribal people.

### **Case Study – 3**

**Name: Valli**

**Hamlet: Vattlakki OLH**

Valli is an Irula woman who lives in the hamlet Vattlakki OLH. She is 52 years old, lives with her mother in law and two sons. Her husband died due to alcoholism 15 years ago. She studied in a Tamil medium school near her settlement. So, she could not read or write Malayalam. Her elder son is a dropout from graduation and now he is an auto-rickshaw driver. Her younger son is pursuing a diploma in a

polytechnic college Attappady. After her husband's death she worked harder for her children to get educated. Hence, she is unhappy about her elder son discontinuing his college education. She has been a worker in NREGA since 2002. After her husband's death she stopped going to work for three years. Later she went to Arogya Madam School as cleaning staff for two years. The salary was not much there, it was two thousand per month, so she quit that job and again returned to NREGA as it gave her a good income. She was working for a brick kiln also during the lean time. Now she is not going because of her health issues. NREGA and goats are the only source of income for her. She, along with her mother in law, did agriculture after her husband's death. But this year they did not have cultivation as the agriculture department had not delivered seeds on time due to the delay from the agriculture department. Her household was identified for the Millet Village programme, and so she did agriculture that year. She did agriculture before her husband's death. There should have been rain during the time she saw the seed, but this time it took another month to get the seeds from the agriculture department. She has some beans but animals are destroying them, as there were a lot of elephants and deer. The yield from the crops has reduced and has become insufficient now. She used to sell the beans to shop earlier, but now the agriculture department will take the harvested crop. How can they give harvest to the officials when the crops are not good! The agriculture department has to implement subsidiary measures like electric fences and seeds on time. When her husband was alive, they used to stay on farmland but now living alone in farmland is not comfortable for her. Wild animal's threat is a challenge for tribes in their farming. They need to stay the whole night on the land to prevent animals from entering. It is difficult for a woman-headed household like Lakshmi's, therefore she is dependent only on NREGA work. She was an active participant in the movement for land

supported by an NGO. Even though her household has land, it would help others if she joined the movement. So, she went to ITDP. She is actively working for her tribal community and many students interning with NGOs from Attappady used to visit her.

#### **Case Study – 4**

**Name: Selvi**

**Hamlet: Vannanthura**

Selvi is an 80 years old Irula woman who lives in the hamlet Vannanthura. She got married at the age of twelve years.. Her husband passed away when she was fourteen years old. She had a son at that time. Her son died struck by lightning when he was two years old. By then she was hospitalised with mental health issues due to her husband's death. It happened when she was sixteen years old. After that, her parents took her back to their hamlet. Later her parents tried to get her married off to her relatives but that man was drunk so she refused to marry him. She is living alone after her parents' death. Her land is not cultivated as she has grown older. The old-age pension is the only source of income for her and the amount is very less. She had fifty goats, but three years ago she fell down from a rock and she had a head injury, after that sold all the goats. Her house is terracotta-roofed which was constructed by One Lakh Housing Scheme, and it is partly ruined now. She couldn't get a new house sanctioned by IAY/PMAY as she is elderly. She asked the panchayat many times for a new house, but she is unable to go to work and do household chores. In such a situation the government has to help her, but they are not helping her. Due to her illiteracy, she was cheated by the postmaster in the nearest post office of her settlement. She used to deposit her pension in the postal service's savings account but all her savings had been transferred to the postmaster's account without her

permission. Whenever she went to the postmaster, he used to get her thumb impression. Once she went to the post office to withdraw money but there was no money in her account. Later she got help from the people from the hamlet and the NGO, and went for legal action. Later the postmaster got caught, but till now she has not received the money. She has had plenty of knowledge of the tribal culture in Attappady since her childhood. She shared her knowledge about farming as a ritual in their community and she also knows the songs sung during the death right ceremony and agriculture. Earlier, agriculture was like a festival for them. A lot of workers come from Tamil Nadu and from other hamlets of Attappady. The wage was food grains in exchange. It was used to harvest a lot of millets, pulses and cereals and make a big pit in the earth to store all the grains to use for one year until the next harvesting season.

## **Case Study - 5**

**Name: Chitra**

**Hamlet: Vadakottathara**

Chitra is 38 years old Irula woman from the hamlet Vadakottathara. She works in umbrella making for an NGO. She is also an activist working against child abuse and domestic violence in collaboration with the NGO. She got married in 1995, after 10<sup>th</sup> standard as her parents insisted on marriage. She faced domestic violence from her husband and got separated from him. She has one daughter and one son. The elder one is studying for a teacher training course and the younger one is in 10<sup>th</sup> class. Since she got married early, she and her daughters grew up together. She is living alone as her children are in the hostel. Right after the separation from her husband, she decided to work for her people and started to work with the NGO as a volunteer in

2010. She learned the law from an organisation called Neethi Vedi of the social welfare department from Wayanad in 2012. Since she faced domestic abuse, she decided to help tribal women to come out of abusive family relationships. Her life is a learning experience for her that motivated her toward social work. There are a number of instances of domestic violence in Attappady. Early marriage is not a fair practice particularly now when the younger generation has many options to get educated. She did not know much at the time of her marriage as she had no contacts outside the hamlet. With the help of the NGO, she has learnt about the need to come out of abusive relationships and the freedom to live the way one wants to. She had land but did not cultivate it. Apart from umbrella making in the NGO, she works with several departments to bring awareness to younger people and also works as a resource person for the college students. Earlier she was a staff in an NGO. The intrusions of migrant settlers are the reason for early marriage of children these days. She criticised AHADS for sexual abuse happened in tribal hamlets when the AHADS staff visited the hamlets.

### **Case Study – 6**

**Name: Saritha**

**Hamlet: Kunnanchala**

Saritha is a 27 years old Irula woman from the hamlet Kunnanchala, a graduate in bachelor of education. She got married when she was 20 years old. Her child died in 2013, it was one of the first infant deaths reported in Attappady in that year. By that time the government brought a plan to prevent infant mortality through a programme called ‘Arogyakiranam’ to give better treatment for pregnant women and infants of Attappady. Nandini was the first beneficiary of that programme. She

delivered her child in the Government Tribal Specialty Hospital Kottathara. It was discovered before the delivery that the infant's heart valve was a problem. So, immediately after the delivery she was shifted to Sree Chitra Institute of Medical Science for the surgery under the programme of 'Arogyakiranam'. But her child's surgery got delayed and the baby died on the 12th day after birth. However, the report said that the child died as the mother was suffering from anaemia and nutrition deficiency. Only the parents know how their children died in Attappady because the hospital officials did not disclose the reasons nor will they be revealed to the media. When the programmes are implemented in Attappady, it is specifically stated that they are meant for the tribal women, but there is hardly any impact on tribal women. This has to be considered seriously. The real reason behind the infant death is still not addressed, because the government is still talking about anaemia only.

### **Case Study – 7**

**Name: Usha**

**Hamlet: Vattlakki OLH**

Usha is a 49 years old Irula woman who lives in the hamlet Vattlakki OLH, she is married to a Malayali man. She has a son who studied up to 10<sup>th</sup> class. She didn't know that her husband was already married before their marriage. Now the husband is living with his first wife and children. She separated from him and lived with her aged mother and maternal uncle and unmarried differently-abled sister. She has one son in that relationship. She studied up to third class. After that, she has not gone to school because of financial problems. She said that during that time there was no income. They only had shifting cultivation and some cattle; their parents could not send them to school. When there were four children, the parents thought it was better

to provide food which is more important. The main source of income for her and family is her NREGA job only. They don't have any additional income except this because they are landless. The land was in the name of her father, it was given for cultivation to a Goundan and later the tenant transferred the land to his name. When she grew up, she started to go to a brick kiln in Tamil Nadu for work. Now she is working for NREGA in Attappady as it is more profitable than labour in brick kilns. She is illiterate so she could not go for any other job. Due to lack of income she could not send son to school after 10<sup>th</sup> class. The government is not helping them under the One Lakh Housing Scheme as they are still living in their old house. She is trying to get a new house through the ST promoter now. For her hamlet there is no proper water source so they need to depend on Jala Nidhi. Sometimes it takes four to five days to get water. What can they do in such a situation and where will they get water and who will get water for them! The only good thing is that they have NREGA and ration cards for rice now.

### **Case Study – 8**

**Name: Priya**

**Hamlet: Nallashinka**

Priya is a 34 years old Irula woman who lives in the hamlet Nallashinka. She got married when she was 18 years old because her parents insisted on her marrying that person. She got separated from her husband as he had another wife. Although she is separated from him, she is still wearing vermilion to avoid people's questions about her marriage. She has two children from that marriage. Her elder son is studying in Navodaya Vidyalaya and her younger son is studying in Sholayur. She had education up to 10<sup>th</sup> standard from the school nearby her hamlet, after that she did not go to



school as her mother fell ill. Her younger son stays with her. Her house is constructed by IAY/PMAY. Her parents have land but it is not distributed to her. Her parents are living in the farmland they have. These days, parents did not do shifting cultivation because of lack of rain, but they have livestock, which is the only source of income for them. She is anaemic and needs to buy medicines once a month. For the last two years, she has been consulting in a private hospital because the treatment from Kottathara is not very effective for her. Half of her income needs to be spent on treatment because she is consulting in a private hospital. She could not do much work because of her health problem which is why she is in umbrella making work only. Previously, she used to go for construction work, but later she moved to umbrella making.

### **Case Study – 9**

**Name: Saroja**

**Hamlet: Keeripathy**

Saroja is a 39 years old Irula woman who lives in Keeripathy hamlet. She is married and has one daughter. She studied till the 3<sup>rd</sup> standard. Because there were a lot of goats at home, she could not go to school. Everyone is going to the Saksharatha Mission as she is also doing, because education is important to live, especially while going outside it will help to read the bus board and also helpful in filling applications. Now she is studying at Saksharatha Mission. The daughter is studying in MRS school Mukkali. Her husband met with an accident after which he is unable to go to work. He was working in a tea estate on the border. After his accident, she started to go to work to take care of her family. Earlier she was going for other jobs like construction, brick kiln, tea leaves and others on the border but stopped due to anaemia. She has to go

early in the morning to the brick kiln or tea estate because it is too far, more than 20 kilometres from her hamlet. The work was strenuous because in the brick kiln she had to stay bent all through the day as her job was to arrange the bricks. In the tea estate, she was unable to carry the bag due to weakness and joint pains. Now she is working for NREGA. In such a situation NREGA is helpful because it does not involve strenuous work. Who else will take care of the family if she does not go to work! She has a house under One Lakh House. Now the house is partially destroyed and she is trying to get a new house in IAY/PMAY. There is no millet cultivation now due to lack of land, lack of rain, lack of electric fence and health problems. It would be good if they could do shifting cultivation because their parents and grandparents are still healthy and they do not have any health issues. But their generation has health issues and is unable to go to work. They never ate the food that their parents ate during their time. Millets and plenty of milk were available at that time. Now they have to get whatever they need from PDS and the community kitchen. She is undergoing treatment in a private hospital in Attappady because the treatment there is better than at the Government Tribal Specialty Hospital.

### **Case Study- 10**

**Name: Ponny**

**Hamlet: Nallashinka**

Ponny is a 54 years old Irula woman who lives in the hamlet Nallashinka, studied till 5<sup>th</sup> standard. There is land, but only 60 cents which is too small for cultivation. She is studying in the Saksharatha Mission because she wants to learn. Her husband died 15 years after their marriage. She started working after her husband's death. She worked in many fields as an unskilled labourer, even in brick

kilns. Now she is staying with her parents because she does not have a house. She had four children. In between she started feeling sick, a kind of mental pressure after her elder son's death. Because of her continuous health problems, her children stopped going to school. Now she is trying to get a new house and also land for cultivation. She was allotted land but it was too far, so she is trying to get land close to her hamlet. There is a lot of land in their panchayat but they are not given land near their hamlet. Her grandfather had eight acres but gave five acres to Goundan for a thousand rupees and 30 years ago when the hamlet was formed by the government her grandfather gave another one-acre land to construct houses in the hamlet. It was in the year Indira Gandhi was killed, and the remaining land was given to her mother and mother's siblings. Mother has land but it will not be given to her because her brothers only have rights to inherit. Her father also had land but that land was given to a windmill for lease during the time of AHADS but later that land was occupied. They were going to AHADS at that time because it gave them a good income. Cultivation did not get the money for survival. So her family stopped agriculture. She started to work for AHADS in planting trees for the project and constructing houses. After the completion of AHADS work, she started going to NREGA. It was a prosperous time for them before the formation of the hamlet as everyone cultivated the land.

### **Case Study – 11**

**Name: Rangi**

**Hamlet: Vadakottathara**

Rangi is a 49 years old Irula woman who lives in Vadakottathara hamlet. She studied up to the 6<sup>th</sup> standard. She did not show interest in education as she did not like to go to school, and at that time there was no one to motivate her. She has three

daughters and one son. Children are educated. One of her daughters completed BDS but is not working because she has children; the other daughter is doing a master's in commerce, and the younger son is a graduate in Physics. She educated her children on her wage labour and hard work. Her hamlet is close to Kottathara town and so there are plenty of opportunities for her to find unskilled labour. Her husband also was helpful so they did hard work together. They cultivate vegetables on their land for household consumption. Due to the threat from animals, they are not taking up shifting cultivation. The electric fence would be helpful but they do not have it as the government is not supporting them. Her house construction is going on under IAY/PMAY. It has been two years since house construction started. It is getting delayed due to the irregularity in the sanctioning of funds. They had a hut earlier and got a house after the year 2000 but she does not remember the scheme under which the house was constructed at that time. She said that her family alone has agriculture in the hamlet. It includes vegetables and little *ragi* depending on the rain. Now she is a supervisor in NREGA, but, during agriculture season, she took leave and went for cultivation. They all have land away from the hamlet and have to stay there to protect the crops from wild animals during the cultivation season. Her land is close to the river and so she has the facility for irrigation. It is taking time to get a muster roll in NREGA and the wages are not coming regularly.

## **Case Study – 12**

**Name: Manju**

**Hamlet: Pottikkallu**

Manju is a 47 years old Muduga woman who lives in the hamlet Pottikkallu. She got married to a Kurumba man when she was 18 years old and later he died. After

a few years, she was married to a man from the Muduga community. She has four kids; the eldest daughter is from her first marriage. Her elder daughter is a graduate in English literature and two children are school dropouts. They are not interested in studying, and the younger daughter is studying at MRS. Maruthi studied up to tenth class. After that she did not go to school. She was not interested in staying in the hostel. She and her husband were volunteers in AHADS for doing surveys. Presently she works in NREGA and is one of the tribal leaders who have worked for the tribal community since 2010. She got the land from her husband and started doing shifting cultivation along with her mother in law. But later everyone stopped shifting cultivation. She also had to stop as it was not safe from wild animals to stay alone on farmland. She really wanted to get her children to get educated because she realised the importance of education and the need for employment while she was working in the NGO. It was easy when AHADS was running as they got income monthly. During that time they had shifting cultivation but did not give more importance to it because they had earnings from AHADS. In 2010 her husband passed away. She has a house constructed by AHADS with a toilet, but it is not used owing to water scarcity and uses the toilet to stack firewood these days.

### **Case Study – 13**

**Name: Sathy**

**Hamlet: Ooradam**

Sathy is 43 years old Kurumba woman who lived in the hamlet Ooradam. She is not literate because there were no schools nearby the hamlet. She has two children studying in the Model Residential School Mukkali in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> classes. Her husband has ten acres of land in Ooradam hamlet and had shifting cultivation in that

land. Ooradam hamlet is one of the remote regions in Attappady because there is no road connectivity to the hamlet. There are only two types of travel available to the hamlet: one is to walk through the forest, it takes seven hours to reach the forest by foot from the town of Kottathara where she lives now. Another option is to enter the hamlet by travelling to the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu. They do not have a ration shop near their hamlet and so they have to go to the hamlet Mulli, the means of transport is the same to reach there. She was diagnosed with sickle cell anaemia eight years ago. Now because of her health problem and the difficulty to reach the Government Tribal Specialty Hospital Kottathara, they moved to Kottathara town five years ago. They are living in a rented house, now a house and five-cent of the land are sanctioned by IAY/PMAY scheme. So they started to construct the house in Chavadiyur hamlet near Kottathara. She works as wage labourer in NREGA. They have a house in their own hamlet, but due to the difficulty to travel to the hamlet, they left their house and the hamlet. The hospital is providing her millets on a monthly basis to fight her nutrition deficiency.

#### **Case Study – 14**

**Name: Omana**

**Hamlet: Kadukamanna**

Omana is a 62-year-old Kurumba woman who lives in Hamlet Kadukamanna. She has seven children; the elder son is a forest guard and the other children are working in NREGA and agriculture. Her husband was working in Malampuzha dam, Palakkad. Her husband passed away. She and her children were staying with him in Palakkad, by that time her children got an education there. Her children dropped out of school after they returned to Kadukamanna hamlet after her husband's death. At

that time there was no facility to go to school because there were no hostels. So her children did not go to school after they returned to Kadukamanna hamlet. There are many roots available in the hamlet, and she ate millets also. These days the food pattern is a mix of rice and millets. She is working as wage labourer in NREGA. There is no benefit for them except income from NREGA. If the panchayat tells them to pave the road, they have to do that, if they ask them to construct a check dam they need to do that. Are the tribal people meant only to do such work! If the wage labour could be given to them in their farmland, it would help them in shifting cultivation. The panchayat was not listening to them and not even visiting the worksite. She used to go to collect minor forest produce also according to the season. She used to get RS 1000 for that per month. Every week she goes to the forest to collect forest produce and gives it to a cooperative society. No one was going to meet the tribal people about the welfare programmes. Their ST promoter was also not visiting the hamlet, only Community Kitchen was functioning there. They have to start from the hamlet in the morning at seven for buying the subsidised food grains from PDS and return to the hamlet in the evening, and also need to spend 600 to pay for a Jeep to reach the hamlet. This year they started agriculture but their crops were destroyed due to heavy rainfall.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

Well-being and welfare are synonymous and interconnected as well. However, planning and implementation might construct them as two different and oppositional entities when it comes to the goals of development conceptualised by the government. This can be seen particularly in the case of marginalised communities such as tribal people living in forests. Initiatives of affirmative action taken up by the government quite often end up being welfare schemes that do not result in the well-being of people. Well-being cannot be interpreted as the loss of livelihood, autonomy and dependence on welfare. Geographical, cultural and historical displacement and dislocation in the name of development can be seen in the case of tribal communities of Attappady.

The fieldwork done for this research, particularly the case studies in the previous chapter, reveal the diversity of identity, opinion and experience among the tribal women. At the same time, there are many similarities that connect the tribal women in current times of welfare and development. They have different perspectives on welfare programmes and their narratives reveal that they are trying hard to cope with the forced change in their livelihood resources and living conditions.

Due to the difference in age, the tribal women's level of formal education is different, but there are some similarities in their dropping out of school, especially the financial problems in the family, parents' lack of interest to send them to school and other barriers like lack of transport, fewer hostels and school. When it comes to the education of the children there are some differences that are very important. As the respondents said that there are many more facilities now for education than the time



they went to school. The younger generation also faced some issues which affected their formal education. There are many positive and negative outcomes emerging from the intergenerational changes. The respondents above fifty years said that there were plenty of millets, pulses and cereals available to them earlier but now they are not available. When it comes to the younger generation of women in the age group of 18-25 and 26- 33, they have not seen such food grains grown nowadays, because over the past thirty years the food patterns of tribal communities have changed. The respondents from this age group informed that their elders were healthy because of the availability of a lot of food grains, and the way they ate healthy food which is not available to them. It is because now the tribal people are eating subsidised rice from the ration shops of the Public Distribution System due to a lack of food production. It has already been mentioned in chapter five that land dispossession is the major reason for the lack of food production. It took more than thirty decades for the changes in the food pattern of tribal communities in Attappady.

There was shifting cultivation, there were enough resources available to the older generations, now these are less available to the younger generations but there are some changes such as more employment opportunities available these days which were not available during that time. But, while the opportunities and facilities increased, the access to resources decreased. It leads to changes in food security and also to the emergence of health problems among tribal women. In the case of opportunities now the respondents have the access to wage labour by NREGA for two hundred days for each household. Only 200 days of wage labour is available for the tribal communities under the NREGA Act. Apart from NREGA, the other kinds of work for women are not available throughout the year as they are seasonal. Hence, sometimes, women do not find work and stay back in the hamlet. In such a situation

the respondents wish to go back to agriculture because it could provide food for the household. From the interaction with the respondents, it is understood that they are distressed about the changes happening in their living conditions because of the welfare programmes. The women said that the government does not support them in agriculture. The women said that since the supportive measures such as irrigation facilities, electric fences, and machines for cultivation are not provided by the government it is difficult to carry out agriculture. Also, environmental degradation is one alarming factor leading to agricultural destruction in Attappady.

In the case studies, the women have reported to have lost their spouse and parents due to a lack of proper treatment because during that time there were no healthcare facilities available in Attappady. Now the situation has changed. There are hospitals in Attappady, especially the Government Tribal Specialty Hospital for the tribal communities but still, the two respondents in the case studies informed that they are consulting a private hospital for their treatment for anaemia. It shows the lack of healthcare facilities for tribal people in the Government Tribal Specialty Hospital. It has already been mentioned in chapter five about the poor functioning of the hospitals and how the hospital authority has referred the tribal people to the hospital outside for treatment. So, though the facilities are better now when compared to the past, they have not reached the beneficiaries, that is, the tribal communities. It is mentioned in the previous chapter that pregnant women need to be admitted to the hospital one month before the delivery to prevent infant deaths. But, during my fieldwork, two infants died in the hospital within a week of their birth.

As has been discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the government has been focusing on the welfare of the tribal communities but not on their well-being. This applies much more to the well-being of tribal women. For instance, one of the

initial welfare programmes for the tribal communities was the implementation of housing schemes. The housing schemes were aimed to provide tribal people with a house to protect themselves from wild animals, and the rain and cold. But, at the same time, it made the tribal communities confined to the hamlet as they were dislocated from the farmland and relocated to the hamlets. This dislocation led to a reduction in agriculture and the use of land. The tribal people used land for shifting cultivation, growing leafy vegetables, and medicinal plants, and grazing their cattle. The fertility of the land was preserved during slash and burn cultivation. It has already been mentioned in chapter four that tribal people used to keep their animals in farmland. The livelihood patterns of tribal communities have changed due to their displacement from their farmland. Hence, the respondents narrated that earlier they had agriculture and animals for milk. They could sell animals once a year to buy the essentials. All these have become scarce now as they started to live in hamlets.

Change is necessary and natural but the change that is forced can lead to increased marginalisation of some people, cultures and livelihoods. The change observed among the tribal communities of Attappady has had a detrimental effect on all aspects of indigenous life including natural resources, agriculture, land, food security, health, knowledge and so on. They were self-sufficient once upon a time without any welfare programmes. But now, there are welfare programmes, development schemes and affirmative measures. However, the tribal communities have lost their autonomy and self-reliance.

When asked about the previous times and the difficulties that tribal people faced during that time, the respondents have some good memories though there were issues related to healthcare facilities, fewer facilities and no access to education. Women above fifty years said that they are not happy with the present living

conditions. For instance, some respondents said that their parents, spouse and children died due to a lack of healthcare facilities during that time. Now there are more healthcare facilities in Attappady than before. There is a Government Tribal Specialty Hospital for the tribal community, but still during the emergency situation, the tribal people are referred to hospitals outside of Attappady from the Government Tribal Specialty Hospital because there are not many doctors there. Some respondents depend on private hospitals in Attappady though it is expensive for them because the treatment that they are entitled to from the government is not available to them. Thus, the facilities have increased due to the welfare programmes initiated by the government provided but they did not really help in improving the living conditions of the tribal communities. The tribal women clearly stated that they want the prosperity of the past but also want to get their rights in the present welfare programmes to support the tribal people similar to the way non-tribal people are supported.

While analysing the present living situation of tribal communities, we notice many changes that occurred over more than five decades. These are caused by changes in the land utilisation pattern, increased facilities such as education, health, housing, transport and infrastructure facilities, and income generation activities with the help of welfare schemes and so on. The observations of the study bring out many important factors that have influenced the livelihood sources and patterns of tribal people in Attappady. The major changes that affected the tribal women are those in agriculture that were followed by their changing roles in agriculture. However, the tribal women are able to cope with the new labour patterns including agriculture labour, brick kiln labour, umbrella making, construction labour, NREGA and so on.

From the responses of the respondents, it is understood that women are more dependent on NREGA. So, it is understood that women's larger dependence on it compared to the other occupations is the result of their acceptance of the programme. The women cited the reason that it provides more income to women than any other work and is not much strenuous to them compared to the other unskilled labour. But, the respondents also expressed their disagreement with the programme. Some of the prominent opinions from the respondents noted the irregularity in the sanctioning of the wage labour by the panchayat. It has already been mentioned in chapter five that the programme ensures 200 days of manual wage labour for a household for a year but, the respondents informed, it is not available to the beneficiaries. It is especially for the two Irula and Muduga communities because they are getting a maximum number of fifty to sixty days of wage labour in a year. Thus, the women informed that it would be helpful for them if they could get 200 days of wage labour since there are very few employment opportunities for tribal women in Attappady. The respondents also pointed out the irregularity in the payment of wages. The respondents informed that it took nearly six months to get the money credited to their bank account after they completed the work. The respondents expressed serious concern about the denial of their demand to get wage employment in their own farmland through which they can resume the shifting cultivation.

Apart from NREGA, one of the important aspects that the respondents focused on was the scarcity of water. It is connected to the non-tribal interference in the environment which led to deforestation. When asked about the source of water, the response was similar across the three tribal communities. It is a stressful job for tribal women to collect water multiple times a day since there is a scarcity of water. It is especially for the respondents from the Irula and Muduga community that they do not

have a stream accessible like the Kurumba community have. This is why the women were upset when asked about the source of water, because during the summer season there is no adequate water provided by the ITDP. This is why the dissent comes from the respondents that the ITDP has not considered their need for water. This is why during summer tribal people need to limit the use of water. Sometimes, the shortage of water lasts for an entire week or more than that. The respondents also questioned that if the water is not regularly available, how could they go for wage labour as they had to spend long hours fetching water. The respondents also added that they still preferred open defecation to toilets because of less water to maintain the toilet.

Formal education is necessary for the tribal communities to get educated and to understand the exploitation of the tribal community by the society. It is also important to be with the indigenous system because it is the core of the tribal life that helps the tribal community to live, especially to sustain their life. Food produced by themselves is important for the tribal communities because of health problems that tribal communities are going through due to lack of sufficient food. The subsidised food provided for tribal communities through PDS ration shops and the community kitchen is not satisfactory because of the quality of the food provided by these programmes. It is observed that women are eating less food. Why does the government produce food for food security if the tribal communities have no food security? Food security does not merely mean not starving, but getting nutritious food on time to maintain health and well-being. So, the respondents opined that the government should take the requirements of the tribal communities while designing programmes of food security. Indigenous knowledge systems should also be considered while doing the above.

From the response of the respondents, it is understood that tribal communities also want to retain their indigenous knowledge systems. The respondents in the age group of 18 - 25 and 26 - 33 informed that they are not much familiar with shifting cultivation. The respondents pointed out that they studied in hostels and also there was not much shifting cultivation when they are back to hamlet after hostel education. They had options such as unskilled labour, volunteering in AHADS and working in NREGA which they opted for to get a reasonable income. While interacting with the respondents it is understood that they want to get their land back and resume agriculture. It is identified from the responses of the respondents that the access to irrigation for agriculture is still far away from them because of a lack of documents for the tribal lands. Hence, the respondents strongly wanted to get the documents for their existing land. It is understood that women want to utilise the forest resources, especially since the state officials turn their back on the rights of tribal communities. Despite the inseparable relationship between the tribal communities and the forest, despite the everyday utilisation of the forest by tribal people and tribal women in particular, the abundant forest resources are not accessible to tribal communities nowadays. For instance, there was enough honey that tribal people used to collect from the forest but now it is available to Kurumbas only. Because of deforestation, Irulas and Mudugas no longer have access to honey. The respondents added that there was a time when they used to soak the spinach seeds in honey overnight and ate it in the morning. Now, neither spinach nor honey is available to them. Honey was one of the healthy foods that they consumed, but they have no honey even for their children.

The respondents added that they prefer to work apart from doing agriculture. That is why the respondents said that it would be helpful for them if they get wage labour in their farmland so that they can do agriculture along with NREGA work.

They informed me that they did not get time for agriculture while going for NREGA work. Due to a lack of income, they could not afford to hire labourers to work on their land. So, they only had to work on their own land. Lack of work opportunities and consequently lack of income are two major problems that the tribal women are facing in Attappady.

NREGA work alone cannot be the sole source of income for the respondents to survive. Added to that, as has been mentioned earlier, there is an irregularity in the payment of wages. In such a situation women have to find an alternative source of income for the household. Earlier, animal husbandry contributed to annual income. The respondents confidently said that in earlier times they used to sell animals annually for their income. These days the number of households having cattle is less. Here the situation of Irula and Muduga communities and Kurumba communities are different with regard to animal husbandry. Irulas and Mudugas do not prefer to keep many animals for income because of the limitations to keep them in hamlets and also due to lack of grazing land for the animals. For Kurumbas, the land is available to graze animals and also there is space to keep animals even if the hamlet is in a cluster form. Kurumba hamlets are isolated from the other tribal and non-tribal communities. Kurumbas are comparatively more dependent on animal husbandry than the other two tribal communities. The Kurumba respondents expressed their concern about the absent dairy outlet near their hamlet to sell milk.

The respondents informed that they actively participated in all welfare programmes with the hope of work, and income. The respondents from Kadukamanna and Gotiyarkandi hamlets participated in the group farming implemented by Kudumbasree. It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter that after this project the Kudumbasree has not collected the millet crops from the farmers and so



the farmers lost their profit and Kudumbasree issued a notice to repay the loan that was given to the beneficiaries during the cultivation. Now the women farmers are legally moving against Kudumbasree to retain their profit.

The women felt that education would have helped them get work and a livelihood. This is why the respondents are giving more importance to their children's education because it could help their children to get employment in future. It is understood from the respondents that they are in the process of accepting the changes happening in their living situation to earn income from the new forms of occupation but at the same time they wanted to get back to their traditional livelihoods.

Once the tribal communities were self-sufficient and produced their own food, but now they have to depend on the market for everything. The respondents said that earlier they used to buy one saree and cut it into two pieces to make a couple of '*chela*' to wear, which was the traditional dress of the tribal women. Nowadays older women wear the same though the dress code has changed because of the mixed culture in society. Consumerism and market culture have also affected the purchasing capacity of the tribal people. So, apart from the problems that they faced with the changing agricultural practices, loss of land rights, and changing relations with the forest, adaptation to welfare programmes is one of the major problems the respondents are facing. It has already been mentioned in chapter three that the tribal women have to play a major role in the absence of their spouse by working hard to earn more in order to shoulder the household responsibilities.

It was observed that the changes in the livelihood patterns of the tribal communities have led to changes in their cultural practices. For instance, the changing status of the hamlet council. Chapter three has mentioned that the tribal communities

followed the hamlet council to maintain the law and order and practice the rituals and make decisions. The implementation of welfare programmes has changed the power of this hamlet council members as the welfare departments have taken up the power of the hamlets. In earlier times the decisions were made in the presence of *Ooru Mooppan* (the chieftain of the hamlet council). The *Ooru Mooppan* of Anavayi said that in earlier times no one had the courage to enter their hamlets without the permission of the *Ooru Mooppan*. After the intervention of AHADS it all changed, their officials visited the hamlets regularly in the name of welfare programmes. They only named the hamlet meetings as *Ooru Kootam*. Tribal people never called their meetings in hamlets as *Ooru Kootam*, because for them it was a private gathering in their hamlet. It was a part of their culture, their belongings and their unity. According to the respondents, now there is no unity at all among them in the hamlet because of the AHADS. It is not only the *Ooru Mooppan* who referred to the loss of unity in the hamlets but also the women respondents.

The disagreement on hostel education is another point of discussion that was observed during the fieldwork. The respondents said that hostel education is one of the major reasons for early marriage among their children. It is because among the younger generation the trend of marriage by choice is increasing. Previously the situation was different and they did not have enough facilities and opportunities to get education. There was no one to advise them about the importance of education. Now both the boys and girls are allowed to get education. The respondents said that because of the use of mobile phones and more freedom, they end up in early marriage by choice. I observed in the field the early marriage of younger generations by choice. But, I could not conclude that it was because of the hostel education, for as an outsider I do not have the position to judge the reasons behind the early marriage of

younger generations. But, lack of motivation is there among the tribal youth. It emerged from the living situation of tribal communities. It is because of the intervention of the government in the lives of tribal people and the decreasing sustainability of tribal people, the younger generations are stepping back. The reason behind this is that when a welfare programme is implemented in Attappady the government does not take the opinion of the tribal community, this is why the tribal activists, *Ooru Mooppans* and the respondents asked where the money had been spent by the government. If the government said that they spent one core on each hamlet, where it is visible is their question. They held that they are still in a deplorable position.

To become the development programmes useful for tribal communities they need to focus more on the requirements of tribal communities. It has already been mentioned that before the commencement of any welfare programmes the state has not asked about the expectations of tribal people for a particular programme. For instance, the Attappady Hill Area Development has been implemented with the participation of tribal communities. The major focus of the project was the rejuvenation of forest, water bodies and infrastructure development. Planting trees, constructing check dams, constructing houses was done with the participation of tribal communities. It was the time that tribal communities largely started to get income. Construction of houses with the participation of tribal people got a house for them as well as the wages for the work they have done. This is why it has already been mentioned in chapter four that AHADS is one of the reasons for the loss of agriculture for the tribal communities in Attappady and also for the livelihood shock for tribal communities. It was also mentioned in chapter two about the houses constructed by the AHADS. So by being the participant in the construction of houses the denial of

the choice is also observed there, that is why some of the houses do not have toilets, some of the houses do not have a door or a window. These houses are not constructed by any contractors, it is supervised by the officials from AHADS only, that is why it ended in partial construction of the houses. More than how to make the tribal communities to be part of development programmes, one has to think how the development programmes are going to be useful for the tribal people.

It was observed that infant mortality is increasing, tribal women are getting anaemic, losing their occupations, denied entry into the forest, restricted in mobility, confined into the hamlets, subjected to domestic violence despite the welfare programmes. It was mentioned in chapter five that the tribal women got the training programmes for various small scale enterprises such as tailoring, wax making, agarbatti making, weaving, etc. from the ITDP. The respondents also informed that after that training programme, they have not been able to utilise it not because they were not interested in such programmes but because there was a lack of market to sell the products. After providing the training to the tribal women, the ITDP has to assist women to find a market to sell the products, but it does not happen in the case of tribal women. The fund has to be released to women for the production cost, which is possible in collaboration with Kudumbasree or the cooperative society, but the ITDP has not explored the possibility of getting income for the beneficiaries. It is visible in all the welfare programmes implemented for the tribal women that the implementation of state initiatives is not much satisfactory.

During the field study, I understood that patience is vital for a researcher to conduct fieldwork. There were many situations during the field study when I came back with empty hands from the study area as there was no one to speak to. It was also difficult to travel from one hamlet to another as the hamlets were far from one

another. This kind of situation helped me understand the issue of access for the hamlet dwellers, and how difficult it is for the tribal people to travel in Attappady. There are tribal people in Attappady still struggling to integrate into mainstream society because of the lack of public transport. To reach important facilities like schools, government offices and hospitals, they need to walk kilometres of distance to catch a bus. There were many situations that I faced, when I had to come back from the hamlet alone with no one to accompany me. In such situations, I faced the consequences of my 'outsider' status among the respondents, being ignored by them. There is a difference in going alone to visit the hamlet and accompanied by a person who is informed about the field and trusted by the field.

## **Findings**

- The welfare programmes implemented for the tribal communities are not resolving the livelihood issues faced by the tribal communities. They are distanced from their traditional livelihoods and remain fully or partially unemployed.
- The sustainable indigenous practices of the tribal people are not preserved or valued in Attappady. The development programmes need to follow a more inclusive strategy to incorporate the suggestions from the tribal council.
- The society and the state seem to have a contradictory stand for the state criticises the changing or modern lifestyles of these tribal communities, but, at the same time, wants them to live in a modern constructed house; similarly, the non-tribal people cannot accept the tribal people leading a good life with decent living conditions..

- The colonial rulers mainly denied the Adivasis' rights to ride, self-rule (tribal council), and forest resources and to land (Bhukya 2012). The current situation of the tribal communities in Attappady is a rigorous continuation of the above.
- The state has till now not addressed the strategies required for the educational development of tribal communities.
- The inherent gender bias of state policies, are still placing the responsibility of basic requirements of a family such as food, water and sanitation on the women's shoulders.
- Land and agriculture are the primary needs to sustain tribal livelihoods, but development policies and programmes have not addressed them from the tribal perspective.
- Tribal women have no land rights, and there is no land for the tribal communities. The emergence of cash crop cultivation has further alienated women from land and agriculture.

Thoughtful, practical and committed changes in policies, initiatives and implementation might bring about constructive change in the status and living conditions of the tribal communities as the rightful citizens of the country. Tribal people need to get the priority and permissions to utilise minor forest produce and the state has to implement feasible marketing opportunities for them to sell the same. Tribal women's participation has to be ensured to facilitate the utilisation of forest resources by women as a means of income. Along with that, welfare programmes need to assist the tribal women for group farming to retain traditional agriculture and also simultaneously work in NREGA. Group farming is a very important initiative to

retain traditional agriculture, so the agriculture department has to provide assistance such as irrigation, protective measures to protect the crops from wild animals, and other threats. So the cooperative societies need to be helpful for the tribal women to sell the yield from their harvested crops and collect minor forest produce. The livelihood sources of tribal communities are connected to the indigenous knowledge systems. Hence, instead of pushing the tribal people to get assimilated into the mainstream society, the state has to learn from the tribal communities about their sustainable livelihoods and implement the projects accordingly. Land is the basic resource to carry out the tribal livelihoods, and so, every tribal household needs to get a minimum of five acres of land with relevant documents, and regulate documents for their existing lands. To improve the socio-economic status of tribal women, their right to land and agriculture has to be addressed. Along with the assistance for the traditional livelihoods the inclusive education of tribal children also needs to be addressed, because for the future generations education is important to find employment and achieve their aspirations. Hence, in order to preserve the indigenous knowledge systems, the formal school curriculums have to be formulated in accordance with the tribal culture, and also there need to be schools near the tribal hamlets so that their children need not be displaced and re-located in hostels.

The observations of the study bring out many important factors that changed the living conditions of the tribal people of Attappady, especially the tribal women. In the changing living circumstances, majority of the tribal households are depending on the welfare programmes, especially in terms of resources, education, livelihood options, housing schemes, sanitation facilities, road connectivity, healthcare facilities, livelihood options and so on. The Irula, Muduga and Kurumba tribal women of Attappady have been successfully balancing reconciliation and resistance in changing

times, preserving their spirit of resilience and exercising their agency, even if it is minimal, in the most challenging circumstances.



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**Interview Schedule**

1. Name of the village:

2. Name:

3. Age:

4. Sex:

5. Religion:

6. Community:

7. Education:

8. Marital Status:

9. Type of family

a) Nuclear

b) Joint

c) Extended

10. Details about family members

| S.No | Relation with the respondent | Age | Marital status | Education | Occupation | Income |        |         |          | Skills |
|------|------------------------------|-----|----------------|-----------|------------|--------|--------|---------|----------|--------|
|      |                              |     |                |           |            | Daily  | Weekly | Monthly | Annually |        |
|      |                              |     |                |           |            |        |        |         |          |        |
|      |                              |     |                |           |            |        |        |         |          |        |
|      |                              |     |                |           |            |        |        |         |          |        |
|      |                              |     |                |           |            |        |        |         |          |        |

11. Occupation

a) Traditional

b) Non traditional

## 12. Income

| Daily | Weekly | Monthly | Annually |
|-------|--------|---------|----------|
|       |        |         |          |

## 13. Type of House

| S.No | Type   | No of rooms | Type of roof |
|------|--------|-------------|--------------|
| 1    | Kuchha |             |              |
| 2    | Pucca  |             |              |
| 3    | Mixed  |             |              |

## 14. Ownership of House

| Self | Parents | Parents in law | Spouse | Constructed | Inherited |
|------|---------|----------------|--------|-------------|-----------|
|      |         |                |        |             |           |

## 15. Source of energy for lighting

- a) Electricity
- b) Solar
- c) Kerosene
- d) Others

## 16. Sanitation facility

- a) Flush
- b) ESP type
- c) Covered pit
- d) Open air
- e) Others

17. Fuel used for cooking

- a) Cooking gas
- b) Kerosene
- c) Fire wood
- d) All these

18. From which source did you receive help for house construction?

| Own | Government | Non government | Others |
|-----|------------|----------------|--------|
|     |            |                |        |
|     |            |                |        |

19. Land holdings

| Own land | Mode of acquisition | Land use pattern |
|----------|---------------------|------------------|
|          |                     |                  |
|          |                     |                  |

- a) What are the main crops which you cultivate?

20. Forest-utilization pattern

| S.No | Resources           | Availability | Types of use |
|------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1.   | Non-timber products |              |              |
| 2.   | Agriculture         |              |              |
| 3.   | Others              |              |              |

21. Do you face any state regulations to enter into the forest?

### **Development related to Education**

22. What are the educational programmes implemented in your village?

23. What are the problems you face to get school-level education?

24. How many children go to school in your family?

- a) What is the level of education of your children?
- b) Is there any problem in continuing your children's education?
- c) Where do your children study?
- d) What are the facilities provided by the government for the education of your children?

25. Are your girl children encouraged to go to school?

### **Development related to Health**

26. What are the healthcare programmes that have been implemented in your village?

27. How do you cope with the modern healthcare system?

28. What are the healthcare facilities you have in your village?

29. When did you start to use the modern healthcare methods? What are the reason behind it?

30. Earlier what was the healthcare methods you had?

31. What are the major health issues which you and your family face?

32. How do you utilize ICDS facilities?

### **Development related to Infrastructure**

33. What are the government programmes for infrastructure development in your village?

- a) What are the changes come after the infrastructure development in your village?

### **Awareness about Government Programmes**

34. What are the programmes which are specially meant for women's and children's welfare in your village?



35. How do you access the government programmes?

36. What do you think about the government-welfare programmes?

**Development Related to Personal Wellbeing**

37. What are the income generative activities that you engage in by the government welfare programmes?

38. Can you explain what the benefit you got from it is, and how far it changes your livelihood activities?

39. How it influence on your day today activities?

**Women in and outside the Tribal Society**

40. Do women participate in Gramsabhas?

41. Do women participate in Oorukootam?

**Unstructured Interview Schedule**

1. Participation in different welfare programs
2. Literacy programs
3. Problems in education
4. Model residential schools
5. Early marriage
6. Domestic violence
7. Alcoholism
8. Divorce
9. Functions of AHADS
10. Income generation activities
11. Main source of income
12. State co operative society and forest goods
13. Responds to welfare programs
14. Functions on NHGs
15. Source of their food
16. Helps got for basic amenities
17. Water and sanitation

18. Role of transportation on daily life

19. Health benefits from the PHC and their respond to it

20. Land rights

21. Intervention of non tribal people

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Congratulations Suchithra Lal, your paper "Tribal Women and Land Rights: A Study of the Irula Tribal Communities of Attappady Tribal Region of Palakkaad District in Kerala" has been accepted as part of the pool of papers we are proposing to included in our special issue for Human Organization titled "Whose Development?: Precarity and The Promise of Development among the Tribes of India."

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--

Victor C. de Munck

# **Tribal Women and Land rights: A Study of the Irula Tribal Community of Attappady Tribal Region of Palakkaad, Kerala**

*(Suchithra Lal, Ph.D. Scholar, Centre for Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, Telangana)*

## **Abstract**

The Irulas were traditionally dependent on shifting cultivation and non-timber forest produce for their livelihood. Both men and women were engaged with shifting cultivation together. Despite the equality in women's role in agriculture, they do not have inclusive rights in credits and lands. With the emerging forms of agriculture introduced by the migrant settlers from South Kerala, shifting cultivation has been replaced by settled cultivation. This disrupted the traditional gender roles in agricultural practices. Based on field work, the paper explores the tribal women's changing livelihood practices through their dispossession in land rights.

Elsewhere, women's contributions to production and household economy have always been considered as passive in this tribal economy. Thus, they are also marginalised in their societies with regard to resource distribution and ownership, and even accessing livelihood and development. Even when the state of Kerala achieved the highest rank in the Human Development Indices, the tribal women in Attappady, Kerala are still underprivileged in their access to resources for their sustenance.

The study found that the patriarchal structure of the tribal community leaves the women with less income than their male counterparts, who spend the same on their personal expenditure alone. The paper argues that, in the context of the multiple forms of land alienation that affect the tribal communities of Attappady and their economic disadvantages, the land rights of women are in a much deplorable condition when compared to the men in the same community.

Key words: livelihood changes, land alienation, tribal women and land rights.

## **Introduction**

Land is an important asset that aids in the survival of the tribal community. Tribal groups share a symbiotic relationship with land as a natural resource (Rupvath 2015). Land is a symbol of security, the main source of income and wealth as well as of social, political and economic power. Land occupancy reflects the social class structure and class relations, as

they represent an array of legal contractual or customary arrangements whereby people engaged in cultivation gain access to productive opportunities linked with land and, thereby, income (Rao 2015). The livelihoods of tribal communities are dependent on land and forest-based resources. Most tribal land share within or near the forest which were acquired over generations.

The Irulas were traditionally dependent on shifting cultivation and non-timber forest produce for their livelihood. Both men and women were engaged with shifting cultivation together. Despite the equality in women's role in agriculture, they do not have inclusive rights in credits and lands. With the emerging forms of agriculture introduced by the migrant settlers from South Kerala, shifting cultivation has been replaced by settled cultivation. This disrupted the traditional gender roles in agricultural practices.

Land rights are important for tribal women to sustain their lives and regenerate the traditional farming practices which were followed by their forefathers over generations. Land alienation affects the tribal women more because shifting cultivation was the primary livelihood source for women. The paper explores the vulnerability of the Irula women through the livelihood transformation that took place in their community, which is analysed through the perspectives of land alienation and land rights of these women.

### **Study Area and Methodology**

The study was conducted in the Attappady region of Palakkad district, Kerala, which is located in a valley below the Nilgiri Hills of the Western Ghats (Kurian 2016). It was the first recognised tribal block panchayat in Kerala. There are three tribal communities located in this region- the Irulas, Mudugas and Kurumbas. In 1951, tribal communities constituted the largest majority in the region; they became a minority by 2011 due to the mass influx of migrant settlers from South Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The demographic change has adversely affected the self-sufficient, self-sustained, and need-based economy, the socio-cultural institutions, traditional farming systems, indigenous knowledge, and power dynamics of the indigenous people in Attappady (AHADS Status Report 2010). Irulas are the largest tribal community in the region; they constitute 26,521 members distributed across 149 hamlets in Attappady. The sample of the study of over 100 respondents from ten Irula hamlets was chosen using the purposive sampling method. Various techniques were employed for field data collection which included unstructured interview schedules, informal conversations, focus group discussion and observation.

## **Irulas and Land Alienation**

Land alienation is a serious problem that the tribal communities are facing in Kerala (Nithya 2013). Tribal communities in Kerala have the least area of landholdings due to the continuous land alienation of the past multiple decades. It was during the colonial period that the tribal land alienation first occurred, where their autonomy over forest and land were taken away. Before that, the tribal communities were self-governing 'first nations' (Bijoy 1999). Kumar (2012) states that the colonial rule inflicted serious damages on the tribal communities by alienating them from customary access to the forest.

The tribal communities in Kerala largely depend on cultivating the land as a means of livelihood. The increased incidence of landlessness led to the degradation in agriculture as well. The major land alienation among the Irulas occurred in the hands of the migrant settlers from Southern Kerala since the 1950s (Suresh 2001). Older generations of Irulas were not generally concerned with material wealth and only relied on hard labour to raise savings (Purushothaman 2005). This simple way of living of the Irulas were exploited by the migrant settlers and so, much of their fertile lands were acquired by the farmers of other social groups.

The easiest way for the migrant settlers to take away lands was by leasing them. These lands were then registered in the names of the migrant settlers without the consent of the tribal people. The latter's illiteracy and lack of knowledge were exploited by the settlers to grab tribal lands. Tribal lands were considered as community land so the tribal people did not keep any land record, especially because the question of who owned the land did not arise among them as the lands were commonly owned (Kunhaman 1985). The tribal communities did not consider land as a private property (Devi 2019). So, when the migrant settlers approached the tribal people to lease their land for cultivation, they were heartily welcomed to do so. As a result of the large influx of other social groups from the former Travancore region to Palakkad district, a large portion of land was lost by the tribal community where they practiced shifting cultivation (Biju and Ravi Raman 2003), mostly from the Attappady region of Palakkad district. The arable lands that the Irulas used for shifting cultivation were not used for surplus cultivation/production; it was used only for the purpose of sustenance and to store the seeds for the next season of cultivation. The migrant settlers knew about this and offered the tribal people bribes for their lands in the form of paper money, paan or alcohol. The women said that the settlers from other social groups persuade their men to drink alcohol

on credit and when their debt increased, they asked for their land as payment. As a result, the majority of the tribal households lost their land and became landless. Some of the tribal households lost their land for amounts as low as Rs. 4-5 to the migrant settlers. Later, these landless tribal people started to work on their own lands as agricultural labourers for the migrant settlers. Raviraman (2003) observes that 20 percent of the tribal households in Attappady became landless because of the arrival of the migrant settlers from 1950-1975.

When tenancy and landlordism were abolished in 1970, the tenants were granted occupancy rights; but in the tribal belts, things took a peculiar twist with the settler farmers acquiring land rights in their grab of 'tenancy' and the adivasis losing their position as landowners (Raviraman 2002). The land rights of the tribal communities whose lands were alienated by the migrant settlers during the 1950s have not been restored by the state government even with the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act 1975 (Bijoy 1999). The households also have not got any compensation for the land acquired by the government for road construction, because it is bound under the FRA rule. This affected and reduced their area of land available for cultivation, which took a larger toll on the income generated from the cash crop cultivations of areca nut and coconut.

### **Land alienation and Transition from Shifting Cultivation**

Earlier, each household among the Irulas utilised more than ten acres of land, which was adequate for shifting cultivation. The Irulas practiced shifting cultivation by utilising a plot of land for cultivation for three years and after that, the land is left fallow for many years to regenerate its vegetation, because they considered their land as a part of the forest- that is why they call their land, *kadu* (forest). Land alienation directly led to a sharp reduction in the area for shifting cultivation (Chacko 2017). As a result, the traditional millet crops were replaced with cash crops by adapting settled cultivation. Along with that, the commercialisation of crops in settled cultivation also attracted Irulas to grow cash crops such as coconut, areca nut, ginger, turmeric, pepper, banana and coffee. These changes led to the decline of food production among the tribal communities, whereas it was the primary concern for the tribal communities before settled cultivation emerged in the region.

Kunhaman observes (1985) some reasons for the tribal groups to leave their lands uncultivated such as the lack of finance and irrigation, threat of wild animals, high proportion of rocky and uncultivable wastelands to total holdings and disputes over water. The settlers' influence in the tribal region impacted upon the shifting cultivation patterns of the Irulas and



they started assimilating settled cultivation into their lives. This change was not viable for many due to the poor adaptation of the new methods of cultivation. A prime reason for the failure of settled cultivation among them was the scarcity of labour power; as the tribal economy was not much monetised in the beginning, they were unable to engage in currency transactions, and hence, it was not feasible for many to participate in the process (Suresh 2001).

While the migrant settlers took away the tribal lands in the plains of Attappady, the tribal communities were displaced to the hills, where there was not enough water for cultivation. Though shifting cultivation also needed irrigation, it was mostly rain fed, and did not require proper irrigation facilities. Lack of agricultural tools, the poor quality of soil due to fertilisers, and frequent crop failures forced the tribal people to turn to moneylenders for loans. The moneylenders acquired great power over his debtors over this period and managed to grab tribal lands (Munshi 2012). With the degradation of agriculture, the men in the communities began to migrate to the outskirts of Attappady in search of occupation and the women were left behind in the households. Only 6 percent of the visited tribal households practised agriculture nowadays, while the rest of them were engaged in unskilled labour.

### **Changing Roles of Tribal Women in Agriculture**

The changing agricultural patterns of the tribal communities in Attappady affected the gender roles in cultivation as well. Shifting cultivation was practised with the participation of both men and women in the households. The process involved doing things together such as cutting the bushes, removing the weeds, preparing the land by burning the bushes and weeds, sowing the seeds on time, staying on the fields during the nights and harvesting together. The post- harvesting activities were more gendered as processing the millets from the crops, drying and grinding those millets and pulses and store for the year and so on were considered as the women's domestic tasks since they are responsible for the food consumption of the household.

There are marked changes in the process of cultivation that one can see in the emergence of settled cash crop cultivation among the tribal people in Attappady. The decision-making power has become more male-centric in settled cultivation. The two main reasons for this shift are that the farming process has become money-oriented, and that it is exclusively handled by the men who practice cash crop cultivation.

In shifting cultivation, the crops were permanent such as ragi, finger millet, foxtail millet, little millet, pulses and sometimes, corn, depending on the availability of the seeds. Therefore, tribal women had knowledge about traditional agriculture- about which seed is so what which time, the growth period of each crop from sowing to harvest, how to prevent the growth of weeds, which crops were to be harvested first and which has to be harvested last, and so on. In the cash crop cultivation of ginger, turmeric, pepper, coffee, coconut, areca nut, cashew and plantain, the women are excluded from the process since it is market-oriented. Tribal women were the centre of the food production and consumption in tribal households, while the men controlled the money; so, when income-centric cash crop cultivation took off, men controlled the income, women became segregated into household chores, taking care of the children and the elderly and raising domestic animals. In cash crop cultivation, the men take decisions such as selecting the crops, harvesting, bringing it to the market and so on. Agricultural processes like ploughing the land, irrigating the land using machinery, etc. are male-centred and the women are segregated into the roles of removing the weed in the field, gathering the crops during harvest, etc because these tasks were considered feminine. Agarwal (2016) observes that, in agriculture, women's roles are not distributed evenly in the overall operations. In the state of Kerala, there is an ever-present notion that women are incapable of doing hazardous work especially using tractors, ploughs, climbing on ladders to pluck pepper, or taking initiative in cultivation in the absence of men in the households or together. Thus, the migrant settlers' gender-biased approach in cultivation affected the egalitarian participation of the women and men that were followed by the tribal communities for generations, made worse by the emergence of settled, cash crop cultivation.

The rapid increase of population on a limited piece of land/forest is likely to degrade the environment (Agarwal 1992). The increased demand for agricultural land due to the population growth in the rural region has caused a decline in the availability of land and other resources for the marginalised people required for cultivation. As other social communities exploit the natural resources, water bodies, soil and vegetation are gradually affected by the reduced irrigation facilities and safe drinking water. The deforestation to clear out farmlands by the migrant settlers causes soil erosion and shortage of water. This also affects the moisture and fertility of the soil of the adjacent tribal lands caused by the runoff carrying inorganic pesticides. The emerging agriculture techniques of the migrant settlers were adopted by the tribal people gradually affecting their soil, resulting in the land becoming infertile for millet cultivation, and so, their shifting cultivation has become less profitable.

Cash crop cultivation does not sustain the tribal economy for a long time. While the settlers or non-indigenous farmers used modern farming practices, the tribal people's cultivation was based on indigenous farming knowledge and approaches. As the Irulas used traditional farming knowledge, settled farming was not economically viable to them due to their lack of awareness about land conservation techniques in settled cultivation and intensification techniques. However, the Irula farmers are aware of land conservation techniques of traditional farming systems like shifting cultivation (Kurian 2016). The shift from shifting to cash crop cultivation affected the fertility of the soil due to pesticides and inorganic manure, which is why most of the tribal households stopped cultivation and kept the existing land fallow. The intensifying agrarian crisis and low economic returns encouraged the tribal men to migrate to other regions in search of alternate livelihood sources either in the construction industry or as agricultural workers in non-tribal farmlands (Tumbe 2014; Agarwal and Chandrasekhar 2015). While the women's role in agriculture changes as a result of the men's activities in the changing labour market and pursuit of their own aspirations, women's role in agriculture becomes uncertain (Pattnaik, et al. 2017). Women's contribution to agriculture is that of a gatherer and substitute agricultural labourer, as the family cannot hire in the absence of an adequate financial outcome from agriculture.

The respondents revealed that their men were not interested in agriculture as much as they used to because of other income sources like NREGA and unskilled labour, and thus, farming is gradually ruined. It is difficult for women to enter into agriculture alone because of the inequalities in the market economy and physical barriers to practicing either shifting cultivation or cash crop cultivation. For protecting the crops from wild animals, it is necessary to stay on the field every night during the farming period, which is difficult for the women to do by themselves because staying inside the forest is unsafe for them. Other reasons for the decline of agriculture include the lack of adequate rain and labour supply, and wild animals' threat.

Land inequality leads to low agricultural productivity, low growth, high rates of poverty, and oppressive social relations (Mohanty, 2001; Faguet *etal* 2016). Settled cultivation requires more labour power, financial assistance and irrigation; class inequalities restrict the access of the communities to these necessities. Agarwal (2016) observes that, while more men moved to non-agrarian sectors, women took part in land preparation during cultivation in the absence of men, but in the context of the Irulas, it is observed that when men move out of agriculture, women also follow suit as they work as their men's shadows; thus, the Irula women did not

have the power to utilise family land for cultivation. There are multiple reasons for that-the major one being, women could not inherit land either from her parents, or from their husbands. Thus, tribal women lacked the power over land as a resource inside their households, where they are segregated to perform their domestic duties.

The male dominance in agriculture among other social groups also leads to Irula women's decreased participation. It is difficult for the women to enter the unfamiliar practice of cash crop cultivation especially with their low market credit and lack of machinery. In the rigid patriarchal system of the community and absence of male support, agricultural inputs and produce, markets, information and government services are inaccessible for the women. Resources such as irrigation, machines for cultivation, etc. are not much accessible for the tribal women compared to other social groups. The women said that the Department of Agriculture was available for providing assistance for cultivation, but that they are generally indifferent to the needs of the tribal farmers, even after they approached the respective departments with their demands. Assistance such as pump sets for irrigation, permission and subsidies for borewell in the farmlands, pesticides for the crops, etc. are not properly provided for these tribal cultivators.

The degradation of agriculture leads to low production and growth and affects the availability of food for the family over the whole year. It is observed that the food grains supplied through ration shops have only substituted the necessary staples or carbohydrates in their food which they previously used to procure from the forest. All of the proteins needed in their daily food are still acquired through hunting and fishing. Women have to bear the drudgery of ensuring the sustenance of the family, and so, they are also responsible for gathering and processing whatever food is available to them.

Hence, women's role in agriculture changed, but their responsibilities in the household remained the same, increasing their work burden. This workload increased exponentially after the men started to become involved in unskilled labour near the hamlet or temporarily migrated to other parts of Attappady. In addition to their work in unskilled labour, the primary burdens of childcare, cooking, and cleaning- and of the tasks such as carrying water, firewood gathering, and grain grinding- fell on the women (Agarwal 2016). Fetching water and collecting fuel wood have become more strenuous for the Irula women since deforestation affected the livelihood sources of the community and increased the distance between their hamlets and the forest. They are forced to walk kilometres of distance to fetch

water and carry it as head loads to their household multiple times a day, as the state has barely provided any mechanism for irrigation and safe drinking water. As there is a lack of space in the hamlets to store the wood, the women need to collect it from the forest every alternative day. These tasks have become a part of their everyday life, along with occupation. Thus, along with unskilled labour, these household chores have devoured more time and energy of the women. While men performed only income-generating activities, women performed both economic activities and household responsibilities here, spending more time on work than men in a day.

### **Irula Women's Changing Livelihoods**

Overall, in the state of Kerala, there has been a drastic decrease in the number of women workers engaged in unskilled labour, in spite of the state achieving high ranks in the social development indices like high female literacy, high levels of life expectancy, low infant mortality, political achievements like decentralised governance, and in maintaining an overall commitment towards social welfare and a cohesive social structure promoting effective interpersonal channels of communication (Bhatt and Rajan 1990; Kannan 1990; Kumar 1994; Mazumdar and Guruswamy 2006).

In the context of the drastic changes that have been occurring in the tribal communities of Attappady, especially in traditional agriculture, unskilled labour has become the primary livelihood source for the women these days. The living condition of the tribes in Attappady are worse than what they used to be decades ago. The loss of land and allied resources and the emergence of a new market economy affected their financial stability, especially with the increasing expenses they face today. In earlier times, the tribal communities used to produce food by themselves; the cattle and the vegetables produced by them were sold outside Attappady to buy salt and dry fish, which were the only commodities that they could not produce by themselves. The respondents said that they also used to purchase clothes once a year during the festival time, and that too, in a very limited number; now they need more clothes, so their expenses have also gone up correspondingly.

The tribal households also have to bear the expenses of their children's education even though the state provides free and compulsory education for them. The women have to find work and income to be able to financially support their families. However, there are fewer opportunities available for these tribal women since Attappady is a rural location. In the stagnant rural economy, there are not many opportunities available to the tribal women to be

able to find enough days of work over a year. The gender gap in the unskilled labour sector is visible in the region because the number of male unskilled workers are more than their female counterparts. Thus, the work participation of tribal women is still uncertain, if not underwhelming in this context. While their social location makes them oppressed in multiple ways, their necessity to work is restrained by social stigma that prevents them from going outside their hamlets for work.

Existing literature indicate that the women are more engaged than men in agriculture; the ratio which Kodoth (2005) found was as high as 10:1. However, the same women lack a systematic support system in the rural areas, which is more pronounced in the case of the tribal women in the remote locations. This is mostly because women's participation in work in general, and agriculture in particular, is not considered as primary labour or income-generating, and this is made worse by their lack of ownership or control over the property that is owned by the household. This extends beyond their work in the agrarian sector, as women's earnings in any other occupation are also not counted as significant in the family.

In the present-day scenario, the majority of the Irula women are engaged in non-agricultural labour. The women are largely dependent on construction work, and the wage labour provided by the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) as livelihood sources. NREGA acted as the major source of income for 75 percent of the tribal women because it guaranteed 200 days of wage labour to the tribal households. However, the respondents said that they do not receive the wages or work for the full 200 days, which makes it more difficult for its beneficiaries to manage their household expenditures with the income provided by the scheme alone.

### **Position of Irula Women in Land Rights**

Land inheritance and property ownership give women economic independence (Arun and Premkumar 2020). Land inequality leads to low agricultural productivity, low growth, high rates of poverty, and oppressive social relations (Mohanty 2001 and Faguet *et.al* 2016). Among the interviewed households, only 43 percent possess land ownership now. Among them, only 3.87 percent of women have land ownership.

For the tribal women who live in a rural area, it is more important to have access to land and allied resources, especially when they are deprived of occupational options caused by their low educational status. Hence, having land would be an asset for the women to avail credit,

sustain the food security of the household and driven income from it. Land rights will give women market access and ensure the welfare of the family (Agarwal 2016). Land ownership, thus, helps the women to gain bargaining power within the households. Like other social groups, land titles are normally in the name of tribal men. Since tribal communities are dependent on agrarian sectors, the lack of land rights is a fundamental source of vulnerability for tribal women (Krishnaraj 2007). Agarwal (2016) observes that the measurement of economic status of women is still typically employment and workforce participation only. Women need land as a security which enables them to overcome crises.

According to the respondents in the field study, married women no longer held inheritance rights on their parents' land among the Irulas. Therefore, the women did not have the right to cultivate on the land by themselves or utilise resources on their own. Some of the women said that in case they did not have a brother to inherit the land, their father's land would be taken by his siblings. Thus, the women did not gain land ownership even when they did not have brothers to inherit the same. Denying the tribal women's right to parent's lands affected their capability to sustain themselves. The respondents who were widows said that they have not got their husband's share of the property even though they had sons, and was still in the hands of her brothers-in-law. In the case of the widows, there is less accessibility to the land of their late husbands because the decision to cultivate on the land is taken by the siblings after his demise. Since the ancestral land has no *patta*, land partition does not legally happen in the tribal households. In this manner, it becomes easier for the male members of the family to ignore the widows' rights over the land. Independent land is more important for the widowed women to reduce their risk of poverty. Currently, women can only manage the land that belongs to her husband or father here, and is reduced to the role of a substitute labourer that engages in the family agriculture to compensate for the lack of hired labour.

The inaccessibility to land rights of the Irula women is connected to their participation and changing roles in agriculture practices. While they were the main workers during the days of practicing shifting cultivation, their participation has markedly reduced with the introduction of settled cultivation. Only the men can decisions about agriculture, and the women have no say about it; this has also resulted in a decrease in the economic returns from the land. Thus, when the men migrate outside the hamlet for work, the land is mostly kept fallow, as the women are denied the right to cultivate by themselves. The women are left behind in their households in the hamlets to take care of the children and the elderly. The few women who participated in cultivation have become producers as well as homemakers in their households.

Even taking up these multiple roles by the women, as producers and homemakers, did not give them the power to make decisions by themselves, nor the recognition as primary income earners, as their income is considered as only secondary for the household economy (Rao 2005). They do not have the right to enjoy the income from agriculture as the tribal men are entitled to all of it. There is neglect on the right to property and land for the women among the tribal community. In such cases, the women get deprived of resources so that gradually the women only have wage labour as their source for sustenance.

Access and decision-making power over cultivation can be acquired through land ownership. Women's independent rights on land would help them at this point to take up cultivation, produce the adequate amount of food required by the household and improve their economic status as a vulnerable section of the tribal population. Agarwal (2015) observes that having land would not only help in the production of crops, but also for the women to practise horticulture, keep livestock, or undertake sericulture. These benefits can increase the opportunities for the women, and the household by extension, to access credits and financial support during economic crises, and improve the bargaining power of the women.

The gender gap in the ownership and control of property is the single most critical contributor to the gender gap in economic well-being, social status, and empowerment (Agarwal 2016). She also argued that ensuring women's property and land rights are the right way to ensure the economic status of the tribal women. The 'empowerment' of women is still considered as achieving education and employment. For the tribal women in Attappady, even education and occupation are still restricted due to class and caste discrimination. Women's land rights, especially tribal women's rights, are not even addressed as a dimension of empowerment by the state of Kerala.

Women's right to land is buried under red tape, while the state recently distributed land among the tribal communities in Attappady in the name of the male members of the households. The irony of women's land and property rights in Attappady is that the government schemes that sanction the aids for building houses are in the name of the female members of the household who do not hold any land ownership to overcome from the burden of building the house.

For the tribal women, having cultivable land in their name is valuable for their economic and social status. There are households that own land near their hamlets, but they are left uncultivated because the male members of the family are not interested in the same. Since the



men control the land, women are unable to make decisions on cultivation and the land is left fallow in this context. The tribal women said that they were interested in cultivating if they could get some land, and make decisions about the same. This would have aided in the food security of the families, and the economic sustainability of the women.

## **Conclusion**

This paper attempted to understand how the issue of land alienation and the agricultural transformation that followed the same affected the tribal women. The paper argues elaboratively that the tribal women's access to land has had an impact on their present living conditions. Land is a tangible asset which helps in attaining good socio-economic positions, good health conditions, and finally, educational attainment for tribal communities. Women's land rights, especially for tribal women, have not been addressed adequately, if at all, in Kerala. It is evident that, even after the land distribution movement that were organised by the tribal communities for the past several decades to give individual titles to tribal people, there is a gender bias in land allotment. I have argued here that improving the tribal women's access to land will help them overcome the gender gap in the informal sector to a large extent because it is an income-generating asset for the women in their lean time.

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## INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR HUNTER GATHERER RESEARCH

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This document certifies that Ms. Suchithra Lal presented the paper Indigenous people and sustainable livelihood development: a study of primitive tribal groups in Kerala in the session (P28) Contemporary challenges among hunters and gatherers: livelihoods, development, and well being at the recently concluded Twelfth International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies (CHAGS 12), held at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang from 23rd to 27th July 2018.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need further assistance.



Lye Tuck-Po, Ph.D.

President, International Society for Hunter Gatherer Research

Convenor, CHAGS 12

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