



The Effects of Land Alienation on the Livelihood of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

An agricultural economy relies largely on the predominance of land. The socio economic status of the population is often determined by the amount of land possessed. In the light of the above scenario, the Scheduled Tribes are the most deprived community in terms of possession of land. The majority Scheduled Tribes of Kerala depends on agriculture (71.98%). Out of these, the majority suffers from land alienation and as a result they are forced to work as casual labourers. The Dhebar Committee also opined that the main cause of poverty among ST families all over India is landlessness (or land alienation). Land alienation resulted in loss of agricultural labour and created a new class of wage labourers. It also resulted in a process of transformation from a self reliant to a highly dependent tribal economy. This paper tries to examine the effects of land alienation, arising from low agricultural activities leading to unemployment, low income, higher indebtedness, poverty and the malignant fact of social exclusion. This analysis is based on the available secondary sources.

Keywords: Land alienation, Scheduled Tribes, poverty, social exclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the Scheduled Tribes (60%) live in the northern districts of Kerala. Landlessness, illiteracy and low standard of living are the main problems faced by STs in these districts. According to Government reports, thirty percent of the STs are landless. Among the ST communities, Adiya and Paniya experiences more number of landless ST families. The tribals became aware of the significance of property only in the late

1990s. The land revolts also got organized only after that. Among the ST families, there was no concept of private property. Property was owned totally by each colonies and permission was given to each ST families in the colonies to cultivate in these lands according to one's own will. This situation changed very recently. The present status of ST families was due to the large scale change in land ownership pattern and the protests associated with it. The 1992 bench mark survey conducted by Economics and Statistics Department shows that 1700 hectares of land was lost to Adivasis in the ITDP centres. For each household, 1.2 hectares was lost. During 1990-91, the average land holding of Adivasis was about 0.52 hectares. This pertains to the burgeoning fact of land alienation among the Scheduled Tribes. This process continued to the 2000s also. The influx of settlers also resulted in rapid land alienation. The enactment of different forest acts also didn't solve the problem of forest rights of ST families. The livelihood of forest dependent communities deteriorated significantly. Land alienation resulted in loss of agricultural labour and created a new class of wage labourers. It also resulted in a process of transformation from a self reliant to a highly dependent tribal economy.

Review of literature

- Vemer Elwin (1943) propounded that land alienation was the root cause of all evils of tribal population. He found out that when there is no land, tribals lost their resistance power and was unable to sustain without any source of livelihood.
- Patel (1998) observes that the root cause of land alienation is the mounting indebtedness problem of

Scheduled Tribe's. It also resulted in the bonded labour system.

- SanathanamVelluva (2006) in his article titled "Dynamics of land use in recently settled forest areas of Kerala" depicts tribals as wage labourers. A majority of the tribal households' farm income share lies below 20% and only a very small percentage of households depend exclusively on agriculture.
- The tribals view land as their prime concern for improving their livelihood. The land alienation has

resulted in the loss of their identity and they are subjugated to bonded labourers. When it is difficult to have a living with the forest produce, it will result in ethnic conflicts. (Walter Fernandes 2012).

- Pankaj and Pandey (2014) visualises that the major determinant of subalternity in India has been the distance and degree of exclusion ie, the distance of social and degree of economic exclusion. They identified land and caste as the two major determinants of social exclusion in rural society

Theoretical Framework



Objectives

- To examine the extent of land alienation in Kerala among the Scheduled tribes
- To examine the employment structure of tribals in Kerala
- To examine the extent of indebtedness among the tribals.

The relative position of Scheduled tribes in Kerala is better as per 2011 census (Table 1). There is a substantial reduction in tribal child population as compared to the child population with the rest of India. The census data gives only a general picture of the tribal situation in Kerala. But a community wise analysis shows a dismal figure of Kerala.

Status of ST as per Census 2011- Table 1

Sl No	Item	ST	
		Kerala	India
1	Population (in lakh)	4.85	1042
2	Percentage to total population	1.45	8.6
3	Decadal growth rate	33.1	23.7
4	Child population to the total population	11.2	16
5	Sex ratio	1035	990
6	Literacy rate	75.81	58.96
7	Literacy rate- female	71.1	49.35
8	Literacy rate- male	80.76	68.53

Source: Economic Review 2014

Table 2 Kerala- ST- percentage of population below poverty line

2004-05 (various NSS rounds)	Rural	Urban
	44.3	19.2
2009-10 (Tendulkar Methodology)	24.4	5.0

Source: Planning Commission

The percentage of Scheduled Tribe population below poverty line in 2004-05 is estimated to be 44.3 in rural areas and 19.2 in urban areas (Table 2). It is based on various NSSO rounds. But in 2009-10, using the Tendulkar methodology, it is estimated to be 24.4 (rural) and 5.0 (urban). But even though the absolute poverty levels has decreased, it may be due to the difference in estimation procedures. The 2004-05 estimation is due to the poverty estimation based on calorie consumption and the 2009-10 estimates is based on per capita

consumption expenditure on basic human needs. Tribals still live in abject poverty.

Land alienation

The process of land alienation took place even before independence. The Scheduled Tribes had no legal documents to prove their ownership. The intrusion of settlers took advantage of this situation and converted tribal lands into their hands. Land alienation happened in two different forms:- (i) permanent removal of title right through selling and (ii) temporary transfer in the form of leasing.

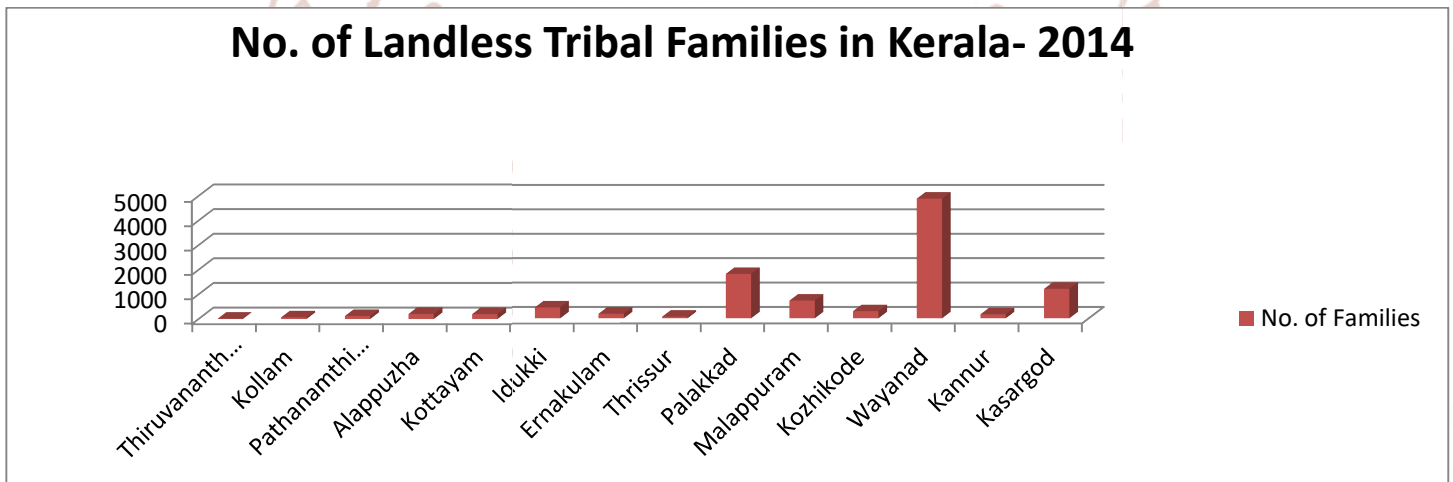
The problem of land alienation and its associated effects came into limelight only after the pronouncement of tribal movements. It led to the enactment of The Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act (1975). But the Act did not serve its purpose. It was a failure.

Table 3

Landless Tribes in the State in 2014	
Districts	No. of Families
Thiruvananthapuram	16
Kollam	76
Pathanamthitta	128
Alappuzha	212
Kottayam	206
Idukki	453
Ernakulam	194
Thrissur	74
Palakkad	1826
Malappuram	733
Kozhikode	301
Wayanad	4913
Kannur	170
Kasargod	1215
Total	10517

Source: ST Development Department

Figure 1



The district having the highest number of landless tribal families is Wayanad followed by Palakkad and Kasargod. The most tribal populated district in Kerala is also Wayanad.

Effects of Land alienation

- Livelihood Issues-Land alienation results in food and nutritional insecurity. They are compelled to work as hired agricultural laborers or remain unemployed.

- Residential Segregation- The Tribal colonies lack basic facilities and are centres of poverty, high rates of unemployment, labor market discrimination etc.

Employment pattern of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala

The Scheduled Tribes are mostly employed as workers or casual labourers in the agricultural sector. Their traditional source of livelihood such as own cultivation, collection of forest produce etc is gradually declining (Table no.4). Agricultural cultivation declines due to

non availability of agricultural land, infertile land and non productive agricultural technology. The Forest Rights Act which empowers tribals to collect non timber

forest produce also failed miserably in mitigating tribal poverty.

Table no.4

Sl No.	Sector of Employment	Families	
		Number	%
I	Forestry Sector		
1	Collection of Forest Produces	1967	1.82
2	Traditional Occupation	366	0.34
3	Collection of Herbal Plants	330	0.31
4	Worker- Forest area	6151	5.7
	Sub Total	8814	8.17
II	Agriculture and Allied Sectors		
1	Agriculture	13174	12.2
2	Animal Husbandry	764	0.71
3	Worker- Agriculture Sector	61122	56.61
	Sub Total	75060	69.52
III	Non Agriculture and Allied Sectors		
1	Petty Trade	205	0.19
2	Worker- MNREGS	2520	2.33
3	Worker- Non Agricultural Sector	10956	10.15
4	Plantation Labour	533	0.49
5	Govt/Quasi Govt employment	5973	5.53
6	Permanent worker in Private sector	530	0.49
7	Permanent worker in Forest Area	90	0.08
8	Permanent Worker in Plantation Sector	240	0.22
9	Others	1134	1.05
	Sub Total	22181	20.53
	No Income/ Employment	1910	1.77

Source: ST Development Department

Table no.5

Main Workers in Agriculture and Allied Sectors in the Age Group 15-59

		Main Workers in Agriculture and Allied Sectors				
District	Total Main Workers	Agriculture	Animal Husbandry	Worker-Agriculture	Total	% to Total Workers
Thiruvananthapuram	6805	1024	31	1517	2572	37.8
Kollam	1810	86	24	162	272	15.03
Pathanamthitta	2217	137	4	378	519	23.41
Alappuzha	1155	4	2	15	21	1.82
Kottayam	5545	1322	104	497	1923	34.68
Idukki	25716	11858	373	6527	18758	72.94
Ernakulam	3365	374	40	236	650	19.32
Thrissur	2391	142	21	307	470	19.66
Palakkad	22672	2064	1139	9832	13035	57.49
Malappuram	5596	139	48	2903	3090	55.22
Kozhikode	4007	98	69	2559	2726	68.03
Wayanad	73802	6504	1316	52227	60047	81.36
Kannur	16496	612	141	12110	12863	77.98
Kasargod	22388	137	124	17043	17304	77.29
Total	193965	24501	3436	106313	134250	69.21

A district wise analysis shows that except in Kottayam, Idukki and Ernakulam, all other districts shows an increase in agricultural workers with those whose occupation is own cultivation (Table no.5). It clearly indicates the intensity of casual agricultural labourers among the tribal population.

ST- indebtedness

The indebtedness of Scheduled Tribe families shows that they are more dependent on the private money lenders rather than the official banking stream. The highest indebted category among the Scheduled tribe is agricultural workers. (Table no.6)

Sl No.	Occupation of Families	Families according to Source of Loan					Total	%
		Cooperatives	Commercial Banks	Kudumbasree	Money lenders/Instituti	Others including		
	Forestry Sector							
1	Collection of Forest Produces	83	85	80	486	74	808	1.34
2	Traditional Occupation	20	18	29	103	27	197	0.33
3	Collection of Herbal Plants	33	21	14	48	7	123	0.2
4	Worker-Forest Area	328	465	416	1558	395	3162	5.23
	Sub Total	464	589	539	2195	503	4290	7.1
	Agriculture and allied sectors							
1	Agriculture	1442	2296	1579	3965	861	10143	16.78
2	Animal Husbandry	52	129	62	150	42	435	0.72
3	Worker-Agriculture Sector	4057	5438	7903	9987	2533	29918	49.51
	Sub Total	5551	7863	9544	14102	3436	40496	67.01
	Non Agriculture and allied sectors							
1	Petty Trade	33	64	32	58	13	200	0.33
2	Worker-MNREGS	155	239	327	514	134	1369	2.27
3	Worker-Non Agriculture Sector	1953	1476	1409	2299	640	7777	12.87
4	Plantation labour	23	47	57	103	31	261	0.43
5	Govt/Quasi Govt Employment	1017	1792	479	698	378	4364	7.22
6	Other Workers	317	293	195	406	126	1327	2.2
	Sub Total	3498	3911	2499	4078	1322	15308	25.32
	No Income	73	53	40	131	39	336	0.56
	Total	9586	12416	12622	20506	5300	60430	100

Major Findings

- Failure of authorities to implement the land rights of tribals.
- Wayanad, largest tribal populated district, faces the highest socio-economic discrimination- highest landless tribes.
- Land alienation converted tribals to wage labourers with meagre income and high levels of poverty.
- Tribal settlements are segregated areas of poverty with no basic facilities- no easy access to work places.
- Most of the tribal families (56.61 %) constitute workers in agricultural sector. 1.77 percent of families have no income/employment.
- Wayanad experiences the highest percentage of agricultural workers among Scheduled Tribes in Kerala.
- Highest indebted families among STs constitute agricultural workers.
- Tribal families depends more on private money lenders than the official banking system.
- Permanent employees among STs are very minimal.

Recommendations

- There should be a special drive by all concerned State governments to complete records of rights in all the tribal areas in a time bound manner with active participation of Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha.
- A complete ban on transfer of tribals land to non-tribals, through sale, lease or mortgage etc
- Successful implementation of complete ban on land acquisition in scheduled areas by government for private entities for industry, mining, real estate etc,
- Effective implementation of PESA, 1996 and Indian Forest Rights Act, 2006 for conferring real ownership and utilization of rights over forest resources by the tribals and other forest dwellers.

Conclusion

The biggest curse inflicted on the tribals population is the never ending process of land distribution. The successive governments allocates huge proportion for the welfare of the oppressed class but not even a penny reaches the beneficiaries. Its high time that the government as well as the bureaucrats realises the leakages in the system and act accordingly.

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