

**Withering Valli: Alienation,  
degradation, and enslavement of tribal  
women in Attappady**

**Mariamamma J Kalathil**

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**Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development  
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## Contents

1.	Area, objectives, and method of the study	5
2.	Population characteristics of tribesfolk in Kerala	9
	Appendix to Section 2: The Fifth and the Sixth Schedules of the Constitution of India	19
3.	Tribal society prior to outside intervention	20
4.	Tribal values, culture, and practices made	26
5.	Impact of outside intervention on tribal society	30
	Appendix to Section 5: Tribes and land restoration in Attappady studies	40
6.	Development programmes in Attappady	42
7.	Conclusion: Withering	58
	References	60



# Withering Valli: Alienation, degradation, and enslavement of tribal women in Attappady

Mariamamma J Kalathil

## 1. Withering Valli: Area, objectives, and method

### Introduction

The study is not merely of academic interest. Having been with the tribesfolk for over a decade, the author has personally realised that the tribesfolk, especially the tribal women have a great contribution to make against the consumeristic, unbalanced, eco-destructive, non-sustainable, and non-indigenous development programmes of the recent times. The various policies and programmes implemented avowedly for the benefits of the tribal people have resulted in their doom. They have been deprived of their appropriate technology, indigenous seed varieties, herbal plants, and indigenous health system, eco-friendly sustainable mode of production, forest and forest products, community-based life, the barter system of exchange, egalitarian, social structure and the sagacious and prudent ways of using the gifts of Nature. Simplicity in their lives is yielding place to greed and the capitalist culture of privatisation, competition, and accumulation<sup>1</sup>.

One observes today faces of worn out, poverty-stricken, withering tribal women, children and men, who know little about the 'developmental' policies and programmes. Tribal people find it difficult to cope with the changes that race around them. Several studies have noted the utter failure of 'development' programme for the Attappady tribesfolk (SWRDM, 1994).

### Area of study

The study focuses on the Irular tribal community of Sholayoor *panchayat* in Attappady block (of Mannarkkad *taluk*, Palakkad district). Sholayoor *panchayat* comprises 56 Irular tribal hamlets. Of these, 5 hamlets were chosen with a target population of 50 persons. Attappady situated in the Palakkad district of Kerala is bordered by Nilgiri district and Coimbatore of Tamil Nadu on its North and east respectively and Malappuram district of Kerala on the west. On its south is

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the Mannarkkadu *taluk* of Palakkad district. About 80 percent of the area is under forest (mostly denuded) as against 27 percent of the State. Bamboo is very common besides teak and rosewood. Many medicinal plants grow wild in the forests. Attappady lies at a height ranging from 450 metres to 2300 metres along mean sea level. Malleswaram peak, where the tribesfolk worship, has a height of 1664 meters. In the western half of the region the soil consists predominantly of clay-loam and laterite; on the east alluvial soils are found. The three rivers flowing in the area are Bhavani, Siruvani, and Varagar. Bhavani River, which runs east, is the tributary of river Caveri and Siruvani is one of the major tributaries of river Bhavani. Attappady has a river belt of 592 sq km. It is reported that there is a good ground water resource. However, much of the eastern part of Attappady is a rain shadow area.

Moolagangal, Vechapathy, Gonjiyoor, Varagampady, and Oothukuzhi were the hamlets selected for the study. Ten tribal families from each tribal hamlet were selected. Selection of the population was mainly based on the availability of the tribesfolk to participate regularly in the research project. Participation was ensured both from males and females, and from different age groups.

### **Attappady at a glance**

Attappady is a tribal pocket in Palakkad district, which lies in the north-eastern part of the State. Though tribesfolk constitute 1.1 percent of the population of the Kerala State, 27 percent of the population in Attappady is tribesfolk comprising Irular, Mudugar, and Kurumbar tribes.

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**Valli** - a common name among tribal women of Attappady. This name is almost disappearing and yielding place to modern names.

**Valli** - an edible root known as *vallikkizhangu* was a staple food of the traditional tribal society. Due to deforestation this root is rarely seen in the hills now.

**Valli** - The tribal goddess who represents Nature of symbiotic of the close bond between the tribesfolk and Nature. Land, the gift of Nature, is not to be sold nor bought. Privatisation of land consequent on the influx of settlers has resulted in a process of alienation of the tribesfolk from their land. The tribesfolk are getting progressively alienated from their pantheist beliefs as well. Hinduism Sanskritised and consecrated the Valli of the tribesfolk into the consort of the Hindu godhead, Murukan. Tribesfolk are inducted into the major religions of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam.

**Valli** - represents the plant kingdom of the forests of Attappady, once a source of life for the tribesfolk.

**Valli** – stands for the strongly-knit traditional tribal community life; however, the democratic practice of decision-making among them, called *Ooru Panchayat*, exists now only in name. Government officials (like ITDP, IRDP, Officers, Collectors, Revenue Officers, and Forest and Police and *Panchayat* officials have reduced the *Ooru Panchayat* almost to the level of a non-functioning entity.

Thus, **Valli** in all its connotations is fast disappearing from the tribal society. Valli is withering – the forest, the land, the food, the culture, the values, the spiritual base, the eco-based community life, the power to make own decisions, and the status of women – in sum, the identity and dignity.

(1991 census)	Population	<i>Panchayats</i>	Villages
Total Population	89,434	Agali	Agali
Female	44,399	Kallamala	Agali
Male	45,152	Pudur	Pudur
Tribesfolk	24,228	Sholyoor	Kottathara
Female	12, 048	Padavayal	
Male	12,180		
Scheduled Castes	3,173		
Others	62,033		

#### **Tribal Groups in Attappady (1991 census)**

Tribal Groups	Population	Hamlets
Irular	19,909 (82.2)	119
Mudugar	2,580 (10.6)	38
Kurumbar	1,739 (7.2)	19
Total	24,228 (100.0)	1

Number of tribal Hamlets - 176

Population density - 83 per sq. km

Sex Ratio (general) - 1000: 979

Tribal Sex Ratio - 1000: 996

#### **Land distribution**

Total Area - 745 sq. km. Forest - 444.05 sq. km. (59.62%)

Cultivable Land - 130.30 sq. km.

Uncultivable land -170. 64 sq.km. Rivers: - Bhavani, Siruvani, and Varagar

### **Objectives**

- a. To understand the role played by tribesfolk, especially tribal women, in tribal society;
- b. To find out the causes of alienation and degradation of tribesfolk especially of tribal women by assessing the land policy followed since Independence, with special reference to the Integral Tribal Development programmes (ITDP) implemented during the Eighth Five-Year Plan Period (1992- '97);
- c. To encourage the tribesfolk to undertake collective and participatory investigation and analysis of the existing conditions and to conscientise them about development programmes;
- d. To propose alternative forms of eco-friendly, sustainable, and indigenous development programmes.

### **Methodology**

Participatory Social Action Research Method (PSARM) integrated with conventional survey method was used. PSARM has been a learning process for the investigating team and yielded rich dividends in its enquiries into the perceptions, priorities, and needs of the tribesfolk. It was also used to conscientise the tribesfolk about programmes implemented for their development. The tribesfolk themselves did much of the investigation, presentation, and analysis.

The Irular tribes of Oothukuzhy, Gonjiyoor, Vechapathy, Varagampady, and Moolagangal hamlets of Sholayoor *panchayat* participated in the study in varying degrees. Ten higher secondary educated young tribal people – six females and four males – were selected from four different tribal hamlets. They were given an intensive training in PSARM for a month. These research workers teamed up for the research in the field for three months. Thirty women participated from three hamlets for intensive discussions. PSARM was used to assess the impact on tribal women as well as to reflect on their contribution to the society at large. The investigation team stayed in the hamlets, sharing their life, conducting in-depth interviews and participating in their daily activities, attending traditional *Ooru* meetings, and holding group discussions at various levels with tribal people.

The report consists of six sections. The second Section traces the origins of the tribesfolk. While Section 3 tries to make a detailed study of the socio-economic, political and cultural life of the tribesfolk during the period prior to outside intervention, the fourth section dwells on the contribution of tribesfolk to the society at large. The fifth section highlights the impact of outside intervention including the Forest Policy of the government and the Kerala Tribal Land Policy with special reference to The Kerala Scheduled Tribal (Restriction of Transfer of Land and Restoration of Alienated Land) Act 1975 on tribal life. The sixth section reports the results of the study of the five Irular hamlets of Sholayoor *Panchayat* in Attappady. A discussion of the development programme implemented during the Eighth Five-Year Plan period is made in Section 6. The concluding section summarises the results of the investigation.



## 2. Population Characteristics of Tribesfolk in Kerala

### Tribesfolk in India

In India a tribal is known as *Adivasi* meaning original inhabitant. The Indian Constitution defines “tribesfolk” as follows:

1. People living in a particular place; 2. Who enter into marriage relationships among themselves; 3. Who have no specific skills in any work; 4. Traditionally or even ethnically ruled by Adivasi leaders; 5. Who speak any special language; 6. Have own beliefs, customs and tradition. (Article 342)

The criteria of geographical isolation, distinctive culture, primitive traits, shyness of contact with the community at large and economic backwardness are generally considered relevant in the definition of a tribe (Sarini, 1997).

The tribesfolk keep a social distance from others and are economically backward. They do not accept the ideas of those whom they do not know. They have their own economic systems. The tribesfolk are thought to be the earliest settlers in and the original inhabitants of India. It is believed that the tribesfolk (*Adivasis*) were already present in the Indian subcontinent at the time of the Aryan invasion. The distinguishing features of tribesfolk are their special relationship to their territories and the relationship between the community and Nature. In India, tribesfolk had co-existed with the general masses and the ruling classes ever since the dawn of civilisation.

The numerical strength of these communities in India varies from tribe to tribe and from region to region. The Great Andamanese were only 27 in number in 1991 as against 5 million Gonds, 4 million Santhals, and 3.5 million Bhils. More than one-half of the tribesfolk live in the Central region, the Southern region accounts for only four percent of the tribal population in the country (Table 2.1).

The tribesfolk in India have suffered throughout history at the hands of rulers and governments particularly during the period since the advent of the British.

Before colonisation of India by the British, the tribal areas had enjoyed ‘self-governing’, although notionally some of these regions formed part of the kingdoms of non-tribal rulers. Tribesfolk had understood that their territories were independent units and they resisted all attempts to bring them to ‘alien’ control. The major changes for the tribesfolk began with the arrival of the British colonial power.

The British began to take control of tribal territories which were abundant in natural (including mineral) resources. Control was made through legislation. During the British period, more than 75 tribal revolts against suppression broke out (Rethanaker Bhengra, 1998). The Scheduled Districts Act XVI of 1874 took tribal areas out from normal district administration. This Act empowered District Executives to extend any Act in force in any part of India to ‘Scheduled Districts (Thapar, R, 1966). The Government of India Act of 1919 provided for the demarca-

**Table 2.1 Tribal Population in India**

Region / states	ST Population. (000s)	% of total po
<b>Central region</b>	37,057	-
Andhra Pradesh	4,200	6.31
Bihar	6,617	7.66
Madhya Pradesh	15,399	23.27
Orissa	7,032	22.21
West Bengal	3,809	5.59
Island region	75	-
Andaman & Nicobar	27	9.54
Lakshadweep	48	93.15
<b>North-Eastern region</b>	8,233	-
Arunachal Pradesh	550	63.66
Assam	2,874	12.82
Manipur	632	34.41
Meghalaya	1,518	85.53
Mizoram	654	94.75
Nagaland	1,061	87.80
Sikkim	91	22.36
Tripura	853	30.98
<b>North western region</b>	506	-
Himachal Pradesh	218	4.22
Uttar Pradesh	288	0.21
<b>Southern region</b>	2,811	-
Karnataka	1,916	4.26
Kerala	321	1.10
Tamil Nadu	574	1.03
<b>Western region</b>	19,076	-
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	109	78.99
	12	11.54

Source: Census of India, 1991.

tion of 'backward areas' and 'primitive' peoples. The backward areas became 'agency areas'. In 1935, these areas were divided into two categories: completely excluded areas (considered extremely backward areas) and partially excluded areas. These areas were brought under the

direct administrative control of the Governors of Presidencies. The British brought all agricultural tribal lands and forests under their control; the relatively isolated tribal pockets were brought under the control of *Zamindars* who had the powers of collecting land revenue.

### **Since Independence**

The modern India nation-state which came into being in 1950, constructed a kind of national unity, which could at best tolerate ethnic diversity but could not fully accept them. The Government of India took a stand that the *Adivasis* cannot be left to lag behind and isolated nor can the natural resources of the *Adivasi* areas be neglected. Integration into the mainstream in a phased manner, without getting them exploited, is considered to be the best strategy.

Policy-makers and scholars have approached tribal development in various ways: political, administrative, voluntary, missionary, and anthropological. The specific cultural traits of the tribal people and felt needs of the tribal people never received due attention. The area development programs do not seem to have benefited tribal communities in the past; sometimes development was achieved at the cost of tribal interests (Bhupinder Singh, 1977).

### **Tribal people and the Indian Constitution**

Almost all the laws made by the British were adopted by the Indian Constitutions. Provisions were made for reservation of seats in State Assemblies and the Parliament for STs; reservations were made for them for appointments in government service also.

It is mainly the upwardly mobile and dominant sections within the STs who have benefited from the reservations. Also it should be remembered that reservations in employment do not cover the private sector. Dwindling job vacancies in the public sector – resulting from the Structured Adjustment Programme of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – have made reservations even less useful. On the other hand, a growing number of tribesfolk see reservations as dangerous, because they serve to co-opt educated tribesfolk into the establishment. They believe that their real struggle lies in getting recognition of their rights and in receiving their legitimate due from the State (National Seminar, ISI, Delhi, 1985).

Essential characteristics of the Vth and the VIth Schedules of the Constitution which lay down administrative principles and procedures for protection and development of tribal areas and tribesfolk are given in the Appendix to Section 2.

### **Government programmes**

During the 1950s social welfare programmes for the tribal areas together with Multi-purpose Tribal Development Project were planned. Tribal Development Blocks were subsequently formed. The main responsibility for the uplift of the tribesfolk – as also of the other vulnerable sections – vested with the State government.

The Central government introduced a scheme for tribal welfare in the Fifth Five-Year Plan document (1977-1982) known as the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) strategy. This programme was

supposed to reach all the tribesfolk living in tribal areas and other scattered areas. The TSP strategy is being implemented through 193 integrated tribal development projects (ITDPs), two modified area development approaches, (MADA), and through micro projects for 74 primitive tribal groups (GOI Annual Report, 1993-'94).

### **Tribesfolk in Kerala**

According to the 1991 census the total population of the Scheduled Tribes in India was 6.78 cr, constituting 23 percent of the world's indigenous people and 8.08 percent of the Indian population. Among the nations of the world, India has the largest population of indigenous people. In Kerala, the tribal population constituted 1.1 percent of the total population of the state and 0.47 percent of the total tribal population in India.

All the 14 districts of Kerala have tribal population. Wayanad (35.82 percent), Idukki (15.66 percent) and Palakkad 11.05 percent together account for nearly 63 percent of the tribal population of the State. The lowest percentage is in Alappuzha (0.87 percent) (Table 2.1). In Kerala, there are 35 groups of Scheduled Tribes living in nearly 70 thousand families. The literacy rate of males is 63.38 percent and females 51.07 percent. The average number of members in the family is 4.6 and the sex ratio is 996 females per 1000 males.

**Table 2.2 District-wise Scheduled Tribes in Kerala According to Census in 1991**

Sl.No.	Name of the Districts of the State	Male	Female	Total District pop.	STs %
1	Thiruvananthapuram	7860	8321	16181	5.04
2	Kollam	1943	1941	3884	1.21
3	Alappuzha	1407	1394	2801	0.87
4	Pathanamthitta	3459	3463	6922	2.16
5	Kottayam	8902	9094	17996	5.61
6	Idukki	25512	24757	50269	15.66
7	Ernakulam	2551	2390	4941	1.54
8	Thrissur	1990	2061	4051	1.26
9	Palakkad	17927	17538	35465	11.05
10	Malappuram	5213	5342	10555	3.29
11	Kozhikode	2654	2753	5407	1.69
12	Wayanad	57386	57583	114969	35.82
13	Kannur	9167	9076	18243	5.63
14	Kasargod	14841	14442	29283	9.12
	Total in the State	160812	160155	320967	100.00

## **Tribesfolk in Attappady before State Intervention**

### ***History of Immigration***

Before Independence, Attappady remained in the Madras presidency. Earlier it had been under the domain of the Calicut Zamorin. The entire area was covered with the dense forests and infested with wild animals, mosquitoes, and leaches. Attappady got its name from *atta* the blood leach and *pady*, the habitation. It is believed that the immigration of the tribesfolk into Attappady began before the 15<sup>th</sup> century. There are three different tribes in Attappady: Irulars, Mudugars, and Kurumbars.

### ***Kurumbars***

Kurumbas who constitute less than five percent of the total population lies in the interior of the forest. They were the first group of *Adivasis* to settle in Attappady. They climbed down the Nilgiri Hills and settled in the northern area of Attappady.

### ***Mudugars***

Mudugas are believed to have immigrated from Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. According to the elderly Mudugas, they had lived in the northeastern part of Attappady under the leadership of *Kovai* (Coimbatore) Moopen. Under his able leadership they lived in plenty and the Moopan possessed huge amounts of wealth including gold, jewels, and other valuables. The Zamorin made several attempts to take away the Moopan's possessions. Finally he succeeded through treachery. The Moopan was murdered cold blooded, by his own lieutenants who were bribed by the Zamorin. Hearing this news the wife of Kovai Moopan committed suicide. To avoid chaos, the Zamorin divided the tribe into *kulams* (clan). Though this legend may not be taken in literal form, it throws some light on their traditional leadership, socio-economic structure, and various changes it has undergone in the past (Census of India 1961).

### ***Irulas***

Irula is a Dravidian tribe spread over the three States of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. They are also known as *Erullava*, *Iruliga*, *Illiga*, *Kasova*, *Urali*, *Kadupujari*, and *Velliga*. In Attappady a subgroup known as (V) *Ettakkada Irulas* is also found. The total *Irula* population in Attappady was nearly 10.6 lakh in 1991. Their dialect is *Irula*. They communicate with others in Tamil, Telugu or Malayalam. In Kerala, they use Malayalam script. Irulas in Kerala are inhabitants of Palakkad district. They are seen at Pothipara, Mayamudi, Palkampandy, Kunapalam of Nelliampathy Hills, Chottoor *taluk* and Agali, Pudur and Sholayoor *Panchayat* of Attappady valley (Luize A.D., 1962).

The term Irular is derived from the word *Irul* meaning darkness. They are rigid in their customs and manners. Yet, socio-economic pressures have compelled the Irula to make some structural changes in their social life. They speak Malayalam and Tamil. The Malayalam script is used in writing. Among the Irulas there are 11 clans (*Kulams*). Hunting and gathering, trapping of birds and animals, shifting cultivation and animal husbandry were their traditional occupations. At

present they are engaged in settled cultivation, animal husbandry, basket making, and wage labour. The Zamorin entrusted at some point in history, with Mooppil Nair, R.M. Palat, and Irul Pat Raj the administration and collection of forest produce. In course of time, the entire valley except the revenue forests came to belong to these three *janmis*. The tribesfolk, who collected forest produce for the *jenmis* (landlords), enjoyed the right of occupancy of the forest area and cultivation in forest lands. For cultivating the land, the tribesfolk had to pay revenue. The agents of *janmis* who oversaw the work of the tribesfolk, themselves managed to get *jenmom* rights of forest lands from the Zamorin. Thus those agents became the oldest *jenmis* of this region, a right inherited by their successors.

### **Immigration to Attappady**

From 1930 onwards immigration to Attappady began mainly from other parts of Kerala and from Tamil Nadu. The immigrants bought the lands from the *janmis* at nominal prices. They comprised small landholders and tenants belonging to the Gowda caste of Tamil Nadu and Christians of south Kerala. The feeble flow of population of the 1930s continued unabated till about the 1960s. Immigrants had to face severe cultivated adversities including Malaria, but most of them settled in the region. They cultivated including the fertile land, which they got at nominal price.

The tribesfolk and the immigrant small cultivators were denied of their rights to enjoy the fruits of their hard labour. The landlords were hesitant to lease out land because of fear of eviction either. This has undoubtedly deprived the poor landless tribespeople to continue their traditional practice and cultivation.

Cultivators had to get the sympathy and favour of the landowners to get a plot of land to cultivate. The landowners often raised unjustifiable demands. The cultivators had to accept them implicitly. Forest lands were leased to them at high rates of rent for an agricultural season. Clearing of forests and preparation of land for cultivation involved hard toil. Often times, the yields were poor. The majority of Muslims who came to Attappady were not, however, cultivators. They were basically traders and merchants.

The decadal growth of population during 1951 to 1961, of the native tribal and in-migrant settler population is shown in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3 Population growth rate of Attappady 1951-1991**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Tribesfolk</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Setteers</b>
1951	10,200	90.27	1,100
1961	12,972	60.44	8,489
1971	16,536	42.20	22,647
1981	20,659	33.19	41,587
1991	24,228	27.09	65,206

Source: Census of India, 1961-1991

The tribal people who formed 90 percent in 1951 declined to 60 in 1961, 42 percent in 1971, 33 percent in 1981, and to a mere 27 percent in 1991. While the growth of tribal people during this four-decade period was by less than 1.4 times, the corresponding figure for the settlers was by more than 58 times (Figure 2.1).

### **Immigration to Sholayoor**

In the late 1880's, the Mooppil Nair, who was one of the three landlords in the Attappady region requested the British, to earmark and survey tracts suitable for plantation crops (Rubber, Tea, and Coffee). This was done and the areas were leased out. The first known lessees were Edward Hamilton and Avery. The surveyed areas were the Attappady valley block, which now comprises Siruvani, Aelamala, Hylton Estates, Koravanpady, Co-operative Estate, and Varadimala (upper and lower) and Varagampady Estates.

Till the 1880s, the only approach to these areas was footpaths from Thadagam and Narasapuram. Later a cart road was made from Thadagam, via Anakkatty. Labour was scarce. The tribesfolk lived in hamlets far from the estates and were afraid to venture far from their homes. So labour had to be imported from Erode and Coimbatore. Moplahs were brought from Malappuram for work in Rubber plantations. When T.K. Alaxander took over the Siruvani estates, labourers from other places in Kerala came (information from the documents of Varagampady Estate). All these estates are in Sholayoor *Panchayat* territory.

While the tribesfolk were afraid to venture far from their hamlets, the labourers did not dare to go out from the estates into the hamlets. But being close to their hamlets, some tribesfolk from Varagampady and Gonjiyoor did go out to work, but only during their free time. So there was very little mingling of tribesfolk and non-tribal people took place.

With a view to further developing his lands, the Mooppil Nair clear-felled the tracts surrounding Vechappathy, Gonjiyoor, and Varagampady. Large tracts of land were cleared and an influx of people from Tamil Nadu and Kerala ensued. Since the Mooppil Nair was involved at that time with court cases with members of his family and all registrations of lease deeds were stopped and his entire lands came under a Receiver. The lessees already registered paid rent to the Receiver. But the *kolkarans* (village assistants appointed to measure the land) also used to collect, unauthorisedly rents from the settlers and the tribesfolk. There was plenty of land for all, but some settlers preferring fields cleared by the tribesfolk, leased in lands from the tribesfolk. The Kerala Land Reform Act of 1970 and the Kerala Private Forest Act 1971 put an end to these chaotic practices.

The Forest Department without verification of documents carried out surveys of uncleared lands, which were in the possession of tribesfolk. Some of the tribesfolk, who had neither the knowledge nor the funds to go in appeal to land tribunals, lost their lands. Table 4 shows the major events in the area since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Intensive government interventions began from 1956. There began an inflow of officials, forest guards, and police into Attappady. The activities of smugglers also gained strength.

### **Time Line History and Mapping through PSRAM**

In order to collect information on the total history a participatory approach was adopted. Fifty tribesfolk comprising both men and women were selected from the five sample hamlets. Details about cropping practices, land relations, occupations, population changes, cultural traditions and practices, were collected. Semi-structured interview method was used as the group was mostly illiterate and had no written history of their own. The capacity of the tribesfolk to pass on their history by oral tradition, mainly through stories and songs was found commendable.

Children and adults, women and men, sick and old, literate and illiterate, all participated in the endeavour.

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**Table 2.4 Major Events in Attappady since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century**

<b>Year</b>	
15 <sup>th</sup> C.	Mudugas immigration in to Attappady
	Forest area and area of malaria
End of 16 <sup>th</sup> C. Early 20 <sup>th</sup> C.	Immigration of Irular Survey of tract land for plantation
1930s	Started the immigration of settlers
1937	Primary school started in Pudur by Madras government in Tamil medium
1938	Primary school in Varagampady-Sholayoor <i>Panchayat</i> - Tamil medium
1940	Flow of immigration of settlers
1940	Deforestation started to construct sleepers in the railway
1948	First post office in Attappady at Varagampady-Sholayoor <i>panchayat</i>
1950	Clear-felling the tracts surrounding Vechapathy, Gonjiyoor, and Varagampady
1951	Tribal population 90.27 % total population 11.300
Till 1956	Part of old Malabar district
1956	With the re-organisation, Attappady was added to Kerala State.
1956	Attappady came under the Community Development Block of Mannarkkad.
1956	Mobile Health unit started.
1959	Mannarkkad-Chinnathadagam Road reached till Kottathara
1960	Bus service started from Mannarkkad to Agali
1960	Sholayoor tribal school started
1960	Educational department took up the Educational Institution from Harijan Welfare Department
1961	Only 21461 population in Attappady-tribesfolk 60.44%.
1962	Mannarkkad-Agali Road extended to Anakkatty
1962	Tribal Block started, the largest Block in Kerala
1963	Official inauguration of the Tribal Block
1963	Agali Government Hospital and Traveller's Bungalow
1965	Milk Co-operative Society started in Kottathara
1968	Attappady was divided in to 3 panchayat- Agali, Pudur and Sholayoor
1969	Bus service till Anakkatty
1970	Land Reform Law
1970	Land came under the state government
1974	Sholayoor farmer's Co-operative society

1975	Tribal Land Bill Tribal
	Tribal Block declared as ITDP (Integrated Tribal Development Project)
1975	Varagampady-Kulkoor Road became feasible for transportation.
1977	Government order to have an Advisory Committee to monitor, the functioning of the Project Authorities
1977	Forest Privatisation by the state. Tribesfolk lost the right to collect and sell the forest product.
1979	ICDS programmes – started <i>Anganwadis</i> in Attappady
1986	Tribal Land Restriction Act Bill came in to force but not implemented.
1987	Bus Service started in Sholayoor
1991	Population in Attappady: 89,434. Tribesfolk, 27.03%
1993 Oct.	High court judgment to return the tribal land to the tribesfolk.
1996	Restriction on transfer of lands and restoration of Alienated Lands Amendment Bill passed by the Assembly
1999	Amendment Bill 1999
2000	Giving <i>Pattayams</i> to few tribesfolk away from their hamlets by the Chief Minister.

## Appendix to Section 2

### The Fifth and the Sixth Schedules of the Constitution of India

Article 244 (i) of the Indian Constitution provides for a Fifth Schedule, to be applied to any state other than those in Northeast India. The Vth Schedule which includes the Scheduled Areas speaks of the law-making in the Scheduled Areas according to the social, legal governing of the tribesfolk. Governors of the concerned states are vested with special powers to decide the ways in which the tribesfolk should be uplifted. The tribal areas in Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, UP, and West Bengal remain unscheduled. Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, have, however, established Tribal Advisory Councils (TACs).

The Governors are also empowered to frame new laws and make regulations in consultation with TACs, in particular to prohibit transfer of land by or among members of STs, and to regulate the allotment of land to STs. Land transactions and money lending could also be controlled by the governors; in reality nothing of the kind happens at all. The public impression is that the Fifth Schedule has failed (Sharma. B. D, 1995).

Article 40 of the Constitution envisaged the establishment of village *panchayats* as self-governing institutions. However, it was left to the central and State governments to fulfil the obligation. With the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment in 1992, areas under the Fifth Schedule were exempted from the obligation. Since then the Provision of the *Panchayats* (Extension to the Scheduled areas) Act, 1996, has endowed the *grama sabha* with powers to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, community resources, and customary mode of dispute resolution, cultural identity, development in the village, ownership of minor forest produce, prevention of alienation, and restoration of illegally alienated lands, and control over money-lending, and institutions and functionaries in all social sectors. The *gramasabha*'s agreement is required by this Act for mining or the auction of minor minerals. States are slow to fulfil this constitutional obligation because this would erode the present centralised power structure and, in principle, provide an element of autonomy for tribesfolk (Visthar, 1995).

### The Sixth schedule

Article 244 (2) of the Constitution of India provides for a Sixth Schedule. In India where tribesfolk live in clusters are declared tribal areas and are enlisted in the VI<sup>th</sup> schedule. The Northeast Tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram are included in the VI<sup>th</sup> schedule. The VI<sup>th</sup> schedule provides for an Autonomous District Council (ADC) for a self-rule with executive, judicial and legislative powers, it has the power to govern, and to implement law and order. The ADC or Self Rule Council is an elected body.

Although constitutional provisions provides for a governing system for all tribal areas and in spite of the Bhuria Committee recommendations, areas in tribesfolk in South India and in Kerala in which tribesfolk live have not been included in the tribal areas till now.

### **3. Tribal Society Culture and Values and Practices**

#### **Socio-economic, cultural, and political life of the Irulas**

The Irulas of Sholayoor lived happily for centuries in the thick forests in their beautiful and clean small huts in small hamlets protected by a ministry consisting of Ooru Mooppan, Vandari, Kuruthala, and Mannookkaran. They lived in perfect communal harmony.

#### **Political system**

Ooru or hamlet is a cluster generally of 25-150 households. There are 176 hamlets in Attappady. Of this 119 are Irula Oorus. Among the Irulas there are nine kulams in Attappady –Vellaka, Karattika, Samber, Kurunagan, Devannar, Kuppli, Perathar, Arumooppu, and Uppli. From a dominant kulam the Ooru Mooppan is chosen from the same family for generations.

#### **Ooru mooppan**

Each Ooru has a headman known as Mooppan. The position is mostly hereditary. He has the final say on all social, cultural, and religious matters of the hamlet. The Mooppan in each Ooru functions as a mediator, articulator, and also a judge with power to impose proper punishments for the miscreants. He is the connecting link between his tribal folk and government officials. At present, the Mooppan is losing influence and power.

#### **Vandari and kuruthala**

The Vandari and the Kuruthala assist Mooppan. Vandari executes the decisions of the Ooru committee. He investigates into complaints and finds out the truth and settles conflicts and controversies. Kuruthala is the messenger. From Ooru messages are sent to other oorus through him and he relays replies. Kuruthala has a ministerial position and Vandari (Bhandari) may be compared to the Treasurer of the modern times.

#### **Mannookkaran**

Mannookkaran is responsible for the agricultural activities of the Ooru. It is only after his performance of rituals and cultivation of his own land that others can start cultivating their land. He happens to be an experienced conventional cultivator and environmentalist with knowledge to forecast weather, assess soil fertility and sustainability, and to decide the appropriate time to begin cultivation.

#### **Thalaveeni and Thalaveenan**

They deal with matters pertaining to the tribal youth (Thalaveeni for females and Thalaveenan for males) including finding solutions for youth problems.

## **Guruvan and Guruvathy**

They perform rituals at the tribal ceremonies.

## **Ooru Panchayat**

It is the decision-making body of the Oorus. All the above-mentioned functionaries and all the men and women in the Ooru constitute the Ooru Panchayat. All members of the Ooru have the right to express their opinions at the Ooru panchayat. Women actively participate in the Ooru panchayat.

## **Economic structure**

For generations the tribesfolk used to collect minor produce from the dense forests, which provided them with food, medicine, and material for shelter. Minor forest produce provided them also with income during the non-agricultural season. Since the tribesfolk were able to get enough food grains from agriculture and enrich their diet with roots, nuts, honey, and fruits from the forest, they had little need to buy commodities from the outside market. They followed the barter system. They kept a limited number of chickens for religious functions and few goats and cattle. In the past these tribesfolk lived and moved about within the deep interior forests. They used to settle down in groups for short periods when they changed their venue of agricultural activities. Each group was constituted by a few of households, varying from 10-40, with a headman and some of his associate dignitaries.

The tribesfolk enjoyed minor forest produce – honey, herbs, and tubers such as Noorikizhangu, (somewhat like yam), Vallikizhangu, etc. They stored Ragi, Chama, and Thena. The tribesfolk lived in their traditional way for centuries in Attappady forest, in isolation from the mainstream population.

## **Agricultural practices**

Traditional tribesfolk practised burn-and-slash and shifting cultivation. Ash provided the manure for the cultivation. Rainwater was the natural source for irrigation. Since a great deal of the land under cultivation was on the hills or uneven surfaces, ploughing using draught animals was seldom practised; soil was raked by human hands.

There were no separate plots in agriculture. They cultivated and made use of whatever part of the forest they chose to cultivate. In the early periods they had used bamboo chips for raking land; Later, a simple tool known Lowari came into use. On the sowing day all the people in the village clean their houses and take bath. Mannukkaran sleeps in the Kula Daiva Veedu (room or house set apart for the dwelling of God) on that night. Early morning a man from Karatti kulam makes Ragi and takes it to show Mannukkaran. It is known as Kanikanal. Before 5' clock in the morning the Mannookkaran goes to sow seeds, with prayer. Nobody was allowed to see Mannookkaran sowing the seeds. It was only after Mannookkaran goes out from the village that the others come out of their houses. Ragi, Chama, Thina, Varak, Pichama, Cholam, and Maize were the important crops cultivated.

During weeding, all the people in the village sing and dance while at work. This practice was known as Kambalakkadu; they had similar practice during the reaping time also. On the harvest day usually a Monday, the villagers clean their houses in the morning. Seven ladies from the Mannookkaran's family and the Mannookkarathy (wife of Mannookkaran) go to the river to fetch water in seven mud pots. They come to the village dancing all the way. They keep the water pots in their Kula Daiva Veedu; the Mannookkaran then goes to the cultivated land with some men in the village and reaps the first sheaf. He makes food with the corn thrashed out from that sheaf.

The Mooppan decided on land allocation for cultivation; distribution was done on the basis of individual needs. When cultivation was over land was reverted to the community. Tribesfolk have preserved over generations the biodiversity and fertility of the forests.

**Irular tribal women in traditional society**

Tribal society had little gender discrimination. It recognised and upheld equal partnership for men and women and freedom of women. Women are the backbone of the tribal economy.

The Irula women have freedom to find and choose their life partners as well as to dissolve their marriage. Divorce and re-marriage are accepted and recognized by the tribal society. There is no dowry system among them. On the contrary, there is the custom of bride price. The bridegroom gives to the bride's family an amount of Rs 101.25 by way of bride price. Men and women enjoyed equal rights to property. Female infanticide is unheard of in this society.

At puberty girls are given special consideration. They are given special food to prepare for their motherhood. Every month during the menstruation period women take complete rest even from cooking. The husband takes up all the household chores – fetching water, bringing firewood, and cooking. A woman in menstruation is exempted from heavy labour. During childbirth, mother is given special food with nutritional value; usually the husband attend to child birth and looks after the needs of his wife.

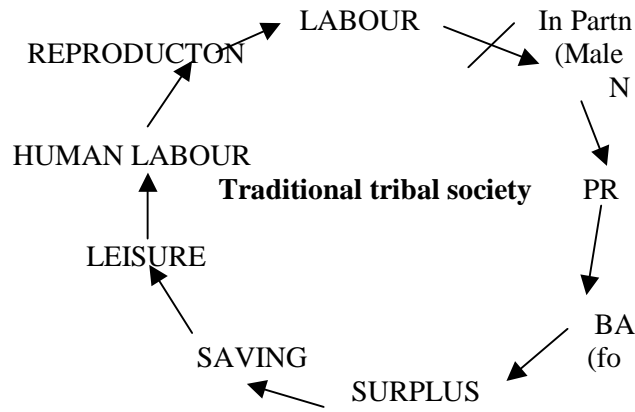
### **Socio-cultural structure**

Tribesfolk live in an egalitarian community. Large issues such as land allocation for cultivation, property, divorce, and disputes in the Ooru or the hamlet are settled at the Ooru panchayat. Tribesfolk lack written language of their own, but this has not prevented them from passing on their rich culture, tradition, and customs from generation to generation. They speak their own dialects. Children are given names on the seventh day after birth usually named in accordance with the family tradition. They are also given nicknames indicating complexion, habits or other particular characteristics.

The Irulas bury the dead in areas set apart as burial ground. Dance and songs accompany funeral ceremonies. The people have strong belief in the spirits of ancestors. In the hamlet there is a special house for worshipping the Kara Deivam. Whenever there is some incidence of disease, they perform poojas. On Shivaratry day they observe abstinence and take food only after they see the light on the Malleswaram mount.

Diagram.2.

**Traditional Tribal Society Life Cycle**



**Self-sufficient and part of nature**

Irulas have a hoary past when they lived in complete freedom. They sowed millets, corn, and maize on the lands they chose. The man trapped the wild boar and other small animals and birds for meat. For vegetables they grew pumpkins, pulses, and grams. Various types of “greens” grew wild as did tomato and bitter gourd. Seasonally there were yams, mushrooms, and bamboo shoots. For a touch of pungency they used the ‘birds eye’ chilli (kanthari). There was an abundance of pure unpolluted spring water, which came down the hills in streams. Their cereal food consisted of ragi, chama, and cholam. Hence they were free from illnesses like diabetes, blood pressure, and anaemia. The intake of lakkiri (keera leaves), the meat of wild animals like deer, wild boar, and squirrels kept them healthy. Food crops were cultivated (even today) without application of chemicals by way of fertilisers and pesticides; instead they use only organic manure – green leaves, cow dung, and ash. For curing illnesses they had their medicine personnel who relied on herbs and roots for preparing magic potions.

In lieu of soap, they used the soap nut, (cheekai), or the tender bark of a tree, which lathers, like soap. To starch cloths they used chama-kanji. Castor kernel was used for lighting lamps. Castor oil obtained from pounding the seeds and boiling them in water was also used. Women wore chela and men wore veshty. They shared cloths and grain among the families during festivals and celebrations. They dried strips of meat over fireplaces and stored grain and pulses for use during the rainy seasons.

For the tribesfolk, natural phenomena such as trees and bushes hold supernatural significance. Interestingly, the trees held in reverence by the tribesfolk also have great economic, medicinal, and food value. Hence customs exercised social mechanisms which ensured that when trees had to be cut down or animals destroyed, the destruction could be minimal. Special techniques of coping were applied whenever necessary. Whenever trees had to be felled or forests disturbed such as for slash and burn cultivation, the forest deity was invoked and permission sought.

They worshiped the sun, the moon, and also their ancestors. They consider the sun and the moon as eternal truth, from whom nothing can be hidden. God manifests through these celestial bodies.

Labour in partnership with nature comes as a primary means to human life. By joining hand with and in partnership with nature the tribespeople entered into production. For him, tribal land was Goddess (Bhoomi Devi) and his belief was that God could not be bought or sold. God is for all. No one could privatise Her. Hence he approached land with great respect and used land only for what is essential. For him, joining with nature itself was a celebration which all of them together celebrated as in Kootake and Kampla. The Mannookkaran who before sowing the seeds led the worshipping of the earth and sowing of the seeds; sowing, planting, weeding, and harvesting were done in a festive mood. Altogether they worked for everyone and when one's area was covered, they moved in unison to the next. Shifting cultivation was value-based and non-destructive.

It is interesting to note that tribesfolk cultivated only what was essential to them-what was needed for their basic needs and ethic of contentment. The understanding of tribesfolk was not to be subjugated to nature or to master nature, but to be in partnership with nature. Surplus of production after consumption is stored and saved for use during days when they can not go to work. What they stored was also for use during leisure time. It was during leisure time that they made discoveries / inventions out of their experiences, making use of imagination and creativity: composing songs, devising dance forms, making tools for agriculture, designing musical instruments, making contrivances for hunting, preparing fishing nets and developing their societal and world view, art, religion and science. Thus there was a rhythmic and harmonious circle that traditional tribesfolk went through. Both man and woman complemented each other accepting and respecting each other.

### **Tribal songs and dances**

The tribesfolk are fun-loving and found time to relax. Old people, especially women play a vital role in transmitting the history, cultural traditions, and the way of living, to new generations. Tribal songs and dances are the main media by which transmission is done.

One of the tribal songs has the following as its theme. It is sung by a woman while her husband is about to sleep. She sings: let us go and cut the ragi. Let us cut the ragi plant at its seed bunch; let us collect the torn sheafs in the upper fold of the chela. The chela (female dress) is worn with two folds in front, which form bags in which things can be stored). For both of us to play, let us tie the double-seated swing on to the branch of the Dhani tree. If you were a basket swing it to the settler. A basket with two pockets is better for our use. Let us go to our lord (Malleswaram) and pray for the gift of a child. If we get a baby boy, we will give him your name Thampaso, if it is a baby girl let us give her my name. If we unite, we would be able to please the goddess Thotere (the goddess of prosperity) and offer her pongal (Cereals specially cooked with jaggery in a new pot).

The woman is using her leisure time to advise her husband about her knowledge and practices. While harvesting, she collects the sheafs that fall away in her own chela-fold. She cannot afford to allow any grain go waste. If husband and wife are united in will and work, they can



enjoy life and perform useful duties; if they are not united the benefit will go to the settlers. The intuition of the tribal woman is well depicted here. Unity and co-operation are considered as the base for prosperity. Pleasing god is essential for the prosperity of their progeny. The tribal woman welcomes their expected child with great enthusiasm and delight irrespective of whether it is going to be a boy or a girl.

Another song gives graphic details of plant growth. It speaks of how to prepare the ground, how to prepare the seedlings, how to plant them in the furrows, how to watch their growth, how to harvest and how to prepare the food out of the harvest. Details of how to remove stones and thorns from the furrows are also given. Red Thina and black Thina seeds should be mixed and sown; birds that come must be chased away. You have to look after the cultivations by watching from a small hut built on the top of the tree. The hut should be 12 feet high from the ground. Take the trips to drive the birds and say Aha, Aha and throw stones at them.

### **Importance of tribal women in oral history**

Tribal history is oral history. Often women are missed out in narrations of tribal societies. Focus on women and understanding their lives from their own perspectives is done rarely. Hence the opinions or ideas given about women or of their way of viewing the society, their aspirations, etc, get totally ignored and grossly distorted.

These invisible dimensions of women in history, have made history incomplete, and biased. Women's place in history and their contribution to development of society are often glossed over by scholars. The best way to understand "women in society that renders them invisible and limits their choices, is to start with concrete issues of women's life – the day-to-day activities, thoughts, feelings and consciousness rather than abstract theories, concepts or categories' (Brinda Rao, 1996).

## **4. Tribal Values, Culture, and Practices**

### **Culture**

Eco-values are integrated values. Almost all the eco-values are feminine values. Tribesfolk, especially tribal women, are the custodians of a culture rooted in integrated values with the perspective that women and nature are one. The wisdom of the tribesfolk tells that the earth meets the needs of not only humans but also the whole creation. Tribesfolk do not take from nature anything more than what is essential, an ethic of enough. They consider forest and nature as their mother. Their art, leisure, and entertainments are in partnership with the mother earth. Their bare-foot folk-dance is a life celebration of their oneness with nature, the peak moments in their life! Thus their folk dance, songs, play, and leisure are the expressions of their intimacy with nature. They perceive the divine and the sacred in the trees, mountains, streams, and animals and in all creation. Earth is mother God for them and god is not bought or sold. Hence they did not buy or sell the land (M. Kalathil, 1996).

They have a very noble culture, social system, customs, manners, traditions, and knowledge. They are the originators and contributors of a beneficial and unique system of nature and indigenous medicine. They discovered, selected, and preserved over generations the rich biodiversity in nature. All the hybrids in food crops, medicinal plants, and animals all over the world are those developed from the rich variety of life species preserved from ancient times by tribesfolk. It is an irony that our modern society considers these people as 'uncivilised and uncultured'. The variety of the slow track 'tribal' science has to be recognised over fast track 'modern' science. High-yielding, fast-growing, mass-producible, monoculture hybrid species adapted in the Green Revolution have to give way to the slow-growing, poly-cultural, natural species grown, gathered or managed by tribesfolk (The Hindu Adivasi Folio, 2000).

### **Sustainability**

Tribesfolk own the natural resources based on natural law and sustainable use of natural resources. Kadu (forest) and its fertile land were for centuries the tribesfolk's own. They never privatised them, nor did they destroy them in the name of development or whatever. Their lives were need-based and not greed-based. They did not feel the need to prove to anybody their wealth status. Even today they have not become money-minded. They go for work for two or three days a week and spend the rest of the days in total relaxation.

When the money gets exhausted, they start working again. The so-called mainstream society may assess this behaviour as laziness, lack of farsightedness, and absence of planning. The way the values of basic-need oriented living and the 'spirituality' of 'enough' are integrated into their everyday life is what astounds mainstream people. In a consumerist society like Kerala, we need to learn this wisdom of the tribesfolk – in this sense a 'tribalisation' process is needed to our use-based, accumulation, and wealth-oriented society (M. Kalathil. 1996).

Whether it was farming or forestry the tribesfolk have been practising sustainable economic activities. According James Gustanme Speth (UNDP, India), 'sustainable human development

is people-centred, participatory, pro-poor and therefore pro-women'. Tribal lifestyles bear this remarkably. Their customs, beliefs, and traditions have been geared to maintenance of balance between their needs and preservation of natural resources. There is no section in Kerala that is 'poorer' than the Scheduled Tribes. Yet, no section has been a bigger champion of sustainable development; further, among them women are the chief protagonists of sustainable development. It is through their patient, prolonged labour that stone terraces have been built and contour bunds and ridges constructed in forest areas (Brinda Rao, 1996).

### **A society with little gender and class discrimination**

*Ooru Panchayat*, the decision-making body of the traditional tribal system allows equal rights and participation for both men and women. There may not be any other human group in the world in which women's freedom is upheld to this extent, avoiding all discrimination in work. Work is common to both men and women. In collecting firewood, bringing water, and grazing cattle tribal men share work with the women on an equal footing. From the study conducted in 50 households this fact became abundantly evident.

The whole traditional tribal society is built on the solid foundation of equality among all life forms including the plant kingdom, water, and the earth. This acceptance is based on the recognition of the symbiotic relationship of all beings with nature. For, them – equality is neither a goal nor a dream to be achieved; it is an integral part of how their society is structured. It is the natural outcome of treating everything with respect. People are given respect and status according to their contribution to society, but only when they are performing the particular function assigned to them. (The Hindu, Adivasi Folio, 2000). Hence a Mannookkaran or a Guruvar or Guruvathy who performs rituals is treated with respect when he/ she is performing the rituals in their respective roles. After the event they are treated as equal to anyone else in the Ooru unlike in today's society where priests and politicians or officials are supposed to be treated with deference all the time. Much of this attitude stems from non-acquisitiveness that is at the very core of their culture, their eco-friendly life, their social environment, and even their economy.

### **Sexually liberated people**

The tribal men and women have full freedom to find and to choose their life partners. Divorce is accepted and recognised by the tribal society. There is no restriction on widow marriage either. There is no dowry system among them. The mainstream culture - which in some regions forces widows on to funeral pyres, of harassing young brides for dowry - has to learn from the gender equality of the tribesfolk. There is no custom of female infanticide and there is no marked preference for a boy or a girl. A tribal man/ woman enjoys great freedom in the choice of life partner as well as in the dissolution of marriage.

The self-governing system and the community-based life remain as an inspiration to Grama Sabha. Importance is given to the community. Every individual is to work towards growth and development of the community. In order to sustain co-operation and equality several customs and traditions are included in its culture and functioning. The prime factor in sustaining togetherness is the egalitarian structure. The Mooppan controls the functioning of the Ooru. The

tribesfolk consider authority as ‘responsibility’ and not as power. Most of the political decisions are made through participatory democracy. The power-craving, patriarchal, and hierarchical mainstream polity needs to take a halt and “tribalise” power as ‘responsibility’ and democracy as “participatory” and “egalitarian”. The following comparison between the tribal and the mainstream values is revealing.

<b>Tribal values</b>		<b>Mainstream values</b>
Ethic of enough	X	Consumerism
Community-based	X	Individual-based
Need-based	X	Use-based (greed-based)
Sustainability	X	Destructiveness
Gender equality	X	Gender discrimination
Egalitarian	X	Hierarchical
Co-operation	X	Competition
Win-win approach	X	Win-lose approach
Authority as responsibility	X	Authority as power
Help	X	Exploitation
Communitarian	X	Privatised
Basic need	X	Profit
Subsistence economy	X	Market economy

Value of co-operation, and win-win approach are seen very much even today in certain hamlets even among children. Three years ago we had conducted some games programme for children. One of the games was dividing the children into two groups and asking them to play throw ball. As the game was going on one side was scoring much more than the other; realising this fact the best player who scored the highest slowly joined the opposite group! For children, playing is more important than winning or losing. We were astonished by the incident; often such incidents compel us to a conversion process of undoing some of our mainstream values.

They find God in their Kula Daivam, their ancestors and nature itself. They believed the presence of the spirit (of the dead) to permeate everywhere. There is not a personified God Concept.

Their customs and traditions are handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. In this process, the elders play a vital role. They hand down to successors their songs and stories as well.

### **Conclusion/ suggestion**

Tribal culture has several elements that mainstream people would do well to emulate. The mainstream people have to realise that technology can and should be to create not merely a more comfortable and affluent world but also a compassionate, human, equitable, and sustainable world. Tribesfolk have many noble values and attitudes to contribute to the present-day world at large.

On the part of the tribesfolk a re-tribalisation process also has become a necessity due to the influence and the absorption of values contradictory to their own. The mainstream technology and science has undoubtedly a lot of contribution to make to the tribal world, but without destroying the tribesfolk' identity, culture, and values. Most discussions on tribal culture tend to dwell mostly on customs traditions, dress, dance, music, and exotic rituals. But the tribal values, which are the most beautiful and sublime, are discussed in much less detail. Their values are what make their lifestyle the only truly sustainable one in the world.

## **5. Impact of outside Intervention on Tribal Society: Alienation, marginalisation, degradation, and enslavement**

### **Forest policy and deforestation**

The forest was the tribesfolk's home and not just their house. It was their religion, culture, values, life style, ethos, social norms, knowledge and associated sciences, technology, and skills. The tribesfolk were integral to the forest eco-system. They faced a steady assault on their livelihoods when the British legislated on the control over India's forests in 1865; with this legislation the tribesfolk became trespassers in their own home, the forests, and began to be victimised by externally motivated systems of forest management that directly violated various facets of their economic and cultural survival (W.Fernandes, 1996).

Till about 1960 tribesfolk relied upon forest for food, fodder, fuel, and wood for agricultural implements and for construction and repair of their huts. The process of deforestation accelerated after 1960 particularly with the increase in wood-based industries such as paper and rayon. The Government of India also tried to convert natural forests into plantations of revenue-yielding trees such as teak, pine, and eucalyptus. Gradually the subsistence base of the tribesfolk was eroded and they began to encroach upon wastelands and to migrate seasonally to urban areas in search of work. Owing to forest privatisation the tribesfolk lost their opportunity to collect and sell forest products. Deforestation reduced their accessibility not only to forest sources of food, fuel and fodder, but also to certain essential things for daily life like twigs of Neem to clean teeth, leaves used to make disposable plates, bamboo used for constructing their huts, and weaving baskets, grass to make brooms and plants and their products for preparing their herbal medicines. Every change also changed their worldview. Deforestation caused the extinction of several species of medicinal plants. Roads were constructed by the intruders from outside to reach the interior of the forest. Roads enabled the outsiders to enter into the forest without difficulty. Their aim was felling down trees for their economic value. In the process, they also stole forest wealth such as honey, wild gooseberry, kadukka, animals, tusks, and nagaratnam. They also developed a good mafia for ganja cultivation.

Both tribal men and women were attracted to liquor, ganja, and beedi given to them by outsiders. Now most of them are addicted to liquor and ganja. Among the 10 young men between the age group of 18-25 years belonging to Varagampady hamlet, interviewed for the present study, six reported having used ganja, four of them having become addicted to it. Nine of them smoke beedi or cigarette and seven use liquor, five of them quite regularly. Sexual exploitation, venereal diseases, disorganisation of family structure, loss of social solidarity, unwed mothers – all those are the features of the tribal society today. Tribesfolk have been enslaved and tribal culture degraded. Tribal women have been the greatest sufferers.

### **Forests in Attappady**

About 80 percent of the area of Attappady is under forest, (mostly denuded) as against 27 percent in the State. About 210 sq. km are covered by revenue forests. Bamboo is a very common plant in the area. Many medicinal plants grow wild in the forest. Trees such as Teak,

Rose wood, Chadachi also grow well here. Restrictions imposed on the centralisation of the forests and the encroachment of tribal land by settlers have caused much uncertainty in the subsistence economy of the tribal people. The story of alienation of the tribesfolk of Attappady from their own self, society, land, and culture is, however, not a unique case. It is one of the countless stories of alienation of tribal societies all over the world.

The homeland of the Attappady tribal communities comprising mainly Irulas, Mudugas, and Kurumbas had been situated in an area abounding in timber wealth, forest produce, and wild life. In fact it was this vast wealth which attracted outsiders to this area. To the tribesfolk nature's products had only functional use, only to be consumed according to needs. Reckless commercial use of forest produce was unknown to them. The dominant value of their society was that of co-existence of the various forms of life in a non-exploitative and harmonious balance with one another.

The tragedy that struck Attappady has its roots in several facts. Firstly, the outsiders to whom they presented products of their rich treasure, the forest land, became highly covetous. They found it necessary to take over the forest by hook or by crook and to de-recognise the rights of the tribesfolk over the forest which they had been enjoying for ages. This process, though had been begun during the British times itself was continued even after Independence. The government policy act of 1864 had empowered the imperial government to declare any land covered by trees, brushwood or jungle as government forest by notification and to prescribe punishments for breach of provisions therein. The Forest Act of 1878 provided for classification of forests into "reserved" 'protected' and 'village forests' asserting the rights of the privileged few, including the government, over forest resources. This enactment led to a phase of sporadic tribal revolts in 1870 and in 1890. The law effectively reduced the tribal people to the status of an encroacher on his/her own land (Census of India, 1961).

In the 1970's a proposal for the Silent Valley Project came up. Instead of waiting to finalise the project, before starting work on it, the government cleared a vast area around Agali and relocated the tribesfolk of Silent Valley. Meanwhile felling began in Silent Valley and the timber thus obtained was intended to be used for railway sleepers. Protest by the public put a stop to this venture. But it was wanton destruction on the part of the government. The almost perpendicular slopes from which trees had been felled were unfit for cultivation. It was on these slopes that the government expected the tribesfolk to make a livelihood.

To sum up: the government is equally guilty in the exploitation of tribesfolk. Instead of preserving their lands the government aided and abetted the migrant settlers in their efforts at displacing and dispossessing the tribesfolk. The Forest Protection Act has helped in restricting massive felling of trees and consequent ecological degradation; but the Act proved to be a heavy blow on the normal livelihood of the tribal population. The "tribesfolk were weaned from happy environments in the name of forest protection. This caused unemployment, poverty, and connected maladies leading to unfathomable desperation. The tribesfolk were gradually converting themselves into a labour folk of the settlers" (CWRDM, 1998).

Under pressure from activist groups, the Government of India announced a pro-poor, pro-tribal, forest policy in 1988. The Indian Forest Act of 1927 is still on the statutes book and is

operational. However, a Forest Bill was drafted by the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF) in 1994 to replace this Act. Social activists (non-governmental organisations) who secured this draft Bill through informal channels decided to go beyond opposing it and to provide an alternative to it. A large number of social activists, forest dwellers, scholars, legal experts and others thus presented a 'People's Alternative' to MOEF in August 1995 and hoped that it will form the basis of the new Forest Act.

### **The Kerala Land Reform Act**

The Kerala Tribal Land Reform Act reduced the self-reliant tribesfolk to mere coolies and dependents, thus throwing them to the abyss of self-degradation. The primary aim of the Land Reform Bill was to put an end to land-lordism. Small farmers from the plains of Tamil Nadu and Kerala entered the tribal habitations in the Western Ghats during the first three decades since Independence. Some of them found cheap, fertile land with the tribesfolk who readily shared their land for cultivation with the new comers; the immigrants took it as a golden opportunity to occupy the land without paying any price, or at nominal prices which could be paid more in kind in the form of salt, liquor, and tobacco) than in cash, by way of lease deeds, mortgage deeds with or without the conscious concurrence of the tribesfolk.

Some of the tribesfolk approached the court, but for want of documentary evidence, they failed to get justice. How could one expect the illiterate poor tribesfolk to preserve and produce any document? Thus the tribesfolk became wage labourers of the lands they had held for centuries, as the result of the land reform. The loss of land threw them to the status of wage labour which was the only means of survival for them. In the process, most tribesfolk became bonded labourers and slaves. Unemployment pushed some of them going out of their traditional occupations and habitat into alien lands and people.

The tribesfolk lost much of their lands and their social organisation broke up due to land alienation. The main source of subsistence of the tribal communities of Attappady had been agriculture. Alienation and dispossession of land constitutes the most important problem facing the tribesfolk today (State Planning Board Study, 1976; Madhava Menon Commission, 1982). When the number of settlers increased, they encroached upon the communally-owned rich lands of the tribesfolk. They moved to less productive lands. Alienation and dispossession of the land eroded the base of the tribesfolk to get credit from the banks (Census of India, 1961).

### **Kerala tribal land policy**

A main recommendation of the Dhebar Commission (1960) was that all tribal land alienated since 26 January 1950 (when the Constitution of India came into force) should be restored to the original rightful owners. Further the meeting of the ministers called by the Centre on 1 April 1975 passed a resolution that "Legislation for Prevention of Land Alienation should be undertaken immediately and this work should be done within 6 months. More important were the legislative measures for prevention of land alienation and restoration of alienated land. A crash programme for effectively implementing these laws within 20 years was to be prepared by each State setting targets for each year which should be periodically reviewed"



In pursuance of this resolution, the Kerala Scheduled Tribal (Restriction of Transfer of Land and Restoration of Alienated Land) Act (KST Act, 1975) was enacted by the Achutha Menon Government. The Act got mandatory assent of the President of India on 11 November 1975 and was passed unanimously by the State Legislative Assembly. This Act was included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution to ensure that the Act itself should not be challenged in any court of law (The Kerala Gazette Extraordinary No.673 on 14 November 1975). The Act was passed in 1975, largely as a political response to the growing Maoist-Naxalite movement then spreading in Kerala, from the hill ranges. The Act was aimed at weaning away the tribesfolk from supporting the Naxalites. But with the movements receding over the years, the State has found the Act politically redundant.

According to this Act, any type of occupation, either by sale, lease, mortgage or force on tribal land after 1960 is illegal. According to the law the transfer of tribal land became a punishable offence since 1975. The offender has to undergo rigorous imprisonment for one year in addition to a fine of Rs 2000. However, the rules operationalising the Act were formulated only a full decade later in 1986 with retrospective effect from 1 January 1982. The salient features of the Act are the following:

1. All transactions of tribal lands during the period 1960 to 1982 become invalid and the lands concerned were to be restored to the original owners who had to pay a sum which was the total of the amount received, if any, as consideration for the transactions and the amount spent for improvements on the land before the commencement of the Act as compensation. The Government might advance the required sum as loan to the beneficiary under the Act, which was to be repaid within 20 years.

2. All transfer of tribal lands to non-tribesfolk made without the prior consent of the authorities were null and void in law and all such lands were to be restored to the original owners.

3. The Revenue Divisional Office of the concerned districts was entrusted with the responsibility of implementation of the Act.

4. No civil court would have jurisdiction to settle, decide or deal with any question or to determine any matter which is, by or under this Act, required to be settled, decided or dealt with or to be determined by the competent authority or the Revenue Divisional Officer. While compensation was provided for lands alienated till 1 January 1982, transactions after that date were declared invalid and hence no provision for compensation was laid down for such transactions.

The Tenth report of the committee of the Fourth Legislative Assembly had directed the government that the Tribal Land Act of 1975 should be enforced within a period of six months after the enactment. But the Act came into force only in 1986. Even after 1986 only transfer by sale was prevented, but extensive transfer by lease and mortgage continued. Much against the presumption that no fraudulent land transactions would take place after that date, tribal lands continued to be transferred to the settlers. The Act applied only to those cases of land alienation where the concerned tribesfolk had records to prove their ownership though they had traditionally enjoyed possession. It is estimated that 8553 applications for restoration of lands involving a total area of 11,000 hectares were filed before the last date (1994) prescribed for receipt of

applications. The number of applications have since risen to 8879; the largest number have been from the districts of Palakkad (2523 from the Attappady region) and from Wayanad (2229). In almost all the districts, applications have been filed. Though the Act was meant to restore such lands to their original owners, it was a Herculean task for the tribesfolk to get back their land, all the more so since many of them did not have proper title deeds and since they had practised shifting cultivation. Even so, some of them have been able to get back their lands and to assert their proprietary rights.

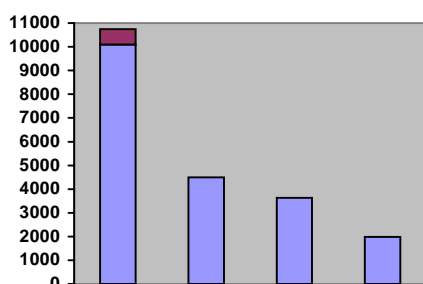
The laxity on the part of the government in implementing the KST Act of 1975 was evident from the fact that of the total 8,553 applications for registrations received at the State level in 1994, about one-half were rejected by the Revenue Divisional Officers, mostly on the ground that there was no proof to show that the lands belongs to the applicants. Only 496 were decided upon and the decision was implemented only in 100 cases. In Attappady, only in 13 cases involving a total area of 44.77 acres, the lands were restored.

**Table 2.3 Population growth rate of Attappady 1951-1991**

<i>Panchayat</i>	<b>Land lost in acres during</b>		<b>Total Area lost during 1977-1997</b>
	<b>1977-1986</b>	<b>1987-1997</b>	
Agali	4487.90	N.A	4487.90
Sholayar	3631.66	N.A	3631.66
Pudur	1986.63	N.A	1986.63
Total alienated Land	10106.19	636	10472.19

Source: Revenue Divisional Office, Palakkad

Thus total alienated land in Attappady during 1977-1997 is 10742 acres.



According to the ITDP survey, the tribespeople of Agali panchayat lost the largest area of land. Irulas lost the maximum area (8996.41 acres); the loss for Mudugas was 1083.78 acres, and for Kurumbas 26 acres. Tribespeople gave all these lands away for small amounts ranging from Rs 20 to a maximum of Rs 2400. Though there were claims for restoration for over 10,000 acres of alienated land in Attappady, the revenue authorities issued orders for restoration of only

3,336.16 acres on 1147 applications. Another 600 applications were pending for final orders for want of relevant documents. Of the 1147 cases allowed, 550 acres involved is medium-sized holdings between two to five acres. In 230 cases the land involved was of more than 5 acres each. The rest of the cases were of holdings of below two acres.

The details of the number of applications for land restoration received by the Revenue authorities, and the information on the nature of their disposal and present status are furnished below.

No. of Applications received (by RDO or Collector) for land restoration	=	2422
No. of Applications rejected	=	1275
		2422
No. of applications on which orders were issued for land restoration	=	1147
Total land allowed for restoration	=	3336.16 acres
Proceedings completed	=	496 cases
Orders given for restoration	=	200 cases
Waiting for verification reports from village officers	=	651 cases
Cases pending in the court	=	600 cases
Cases restored	=	13 cases
Land restored	=	44.77 acres

(Data from RDO Office Ottappalam)

In Eastern Attappady which includes Sholayoor panchayat, lands belonging to the Irulas were taken over by immigrants from Tamil Nadu. Gowders took over the fertile lands of Irulas who moved to the less productive lands. In fact in 1984, the government instructed all the offices of the Registration Department not to register any more such transactions. Even after the KST Act 1975, transactions and registrations of the tribal land had been going on.

To add injury to insult, the encroachers were empowered to claim even compensation for tribal lands involved in such transactions. But such claims were not acted upon by the officials. At present, the encroached lands are full of houses / bungalows and plantations owned by the settlers who argue that it was cruel to evict them at this stage.

Since 1975 when the KST Act was passed the government showed utter callousness first by delaying for 11 years the formulation of the rules to operationalise the Act (till 1986) and subsequently till today by making deliberate effort to ensure the non-implementation of the Act thus subverting the Act itself. During the past quarter of a century the ground reality has changed considerably. The pretext of this procrastinating policy was that the Act was unjust to the immigrant landholders and that it created a potentially dangerous conflict situation. It was also alleged that the Act also effectively sought to promote a communal divide between the tribespeople and the non-tribesfolk.

In a public interest litigation filed by Dr Nalla Tambi Thera of Wayanad in 1988 in the Kerala High Court, the judge issued an order on 15 October 1993 giving six months' time for implementation of the KST Act 1975. The Court extended the last date for carrying out its order on the appeal of the then government, for a total period of two years-and-a-half ending on

15 April 1996. The government has not carried out the orders of the Court. The monthly progress reports by RDOs regarding the progress of implementation of the Act was to be placed in the Court as per the order of the High court in November 1995 (The Hindu, 1995).

On 9 August 1996 the principal secretary for development of SCs/STs filed an affidavit that there was difficulty to implement the Act in view of the organised resistance to it. On 14 August 1996, the Court ordered that within six weeks ending 30 September the RDOs should effect the delivery of possession of alienated lands to its original owners in cases in which no appeals were pending against the order for restoration of land and in which no compensation is payable. To carry this out adequate law and order machinery was to be utilised. Regarding the compliance of this order, the RDOs were to file affidavits by 30 September 1996.

In order to meet the deadline of 30 September set by the High Court and to avoid contempt of Court proceedings and hauling up of RDOs, the government finally managed to pass the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction of Transfer of Land and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Amendment Bill, on 23 September 1996 in the Assembly despite widespread opposition from tribesfolk and their supporters.

### **The KST amendment bills**

Ironically enough, the Amendment Bill of 1996 sought to amend the crucial provisions of the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (KST) Act 1975. But the President of India, K. R. Narayanan did not give assent to the Amendment Bill passed by the Kerala Assembly.

There had been demand from various quarters (both by the tribesfolk and voluntary organisations working among the tribesfolk) which pointed out that the best way was to amend the 1975 Act and re-settle the settlers was to give them back the same amount of money and land as offered to the tribesfolk in the Bill. The tribesfolk who lived in their hamlets for hundreds of years should not be uprooted from their environment. In spite of the refusal of consent by the President, the government was supposed to obey the orders of Kerala High Court, which wanted restoration of the alienated lands to the tribesfolk.

The KST Amendment Bill 1996 sought to legitimise all transactions of tribal lands during the period 1960 to 1986 January 24. This, in effect, was counter to the original intention of the restoration of alienated lands. All transfer of tribal lands to non-tribesfolk was restricted from 24 January 1986. Since 1986, only a negligible area of tribal land was alienated, hence very little land had to be restored (Indian Express, 1996).

The KST Act, 1975 itself does not in any significant manner, address the important dimensions of the land issue of the tribesfolk simply because it focuses only on the lands for which the tribesfolk have records. The amendment sought to nullify even this. If the KST Act 1975 was impractical and unjust to the settler encroachers as claimed by the very same political parties who originally supported the enactment, why was the Act not amended before 1996? It is clear that only when faced with a legal problem which arose out of the High Court Order, the government came out with this argument which implies that the political parties and the government were hell-bent to protect a small section of the powerful elite affected by Act.

The stance taken by tribal organisations is that the governments by providing alternate fertile lands and sufficient compensation to the settler encroachers, is taking steps to gratify the parties “aggrieved by the Act i.e., the affluent settler-encroachers. At the same time it is trying to pacify the tribesfolk by offering them alternate infertile land. This is clear case of discrimination, they alleged. The argument put forward, on the other hand, in favour of the settlers is as follows:

1. The settlers had sold whatever they had before migrating to the hill ranges (where they bought tribal land), faced untold miseries, and transformed a totally uncultivated land into rich and productive farms and plantations. The Act of 1975, if implemented could, at one stroke, mercilessly uproot a large number of settlers, turn them indigent and throw them into the streets;
2. The tribal lands were purchased legally except in a very few isolated cases. Hence it is grossly unjust to deprive them of their lands and their livelihood;
3. The tribesfolk do not have the means to raise funds or secure loans to pay the compensation to the settlers in return for the lands.

Behind these arguments there lie several hidden issues. However, the primary reason for the current impasse is the lack of political will, resulting in the failure of government to implement its own law.

As per the amendment, alternative lands are to be provided to the Adivasi beneficiaries. It is suspected that the government plans to utilise the lands acquired by the Kerala Private Forest (Vesting and Assignment) Act 1971 and the surplus lands available with the state for this purpose, a step which is illegal because these lands are meant specifically for allotment to landless tribesfolk who are actually those whose enjoyment was unjustly left unrecorded and who would not be the beneficiary under the KST Act 1975. Besides there would not be sufficient revenue lands to earmark as alternative lands.

Disillusioned with political parties, the tribesfolk began organising themselves over the past decade. Their increasingly growing voice was, however, consistently ignored by the powers that be. When the land issue came to the forefront, after adequate warnings, the tribesfolk began launching a land struggle. In response, a non-party body Karshaka Raksha Samithi, an organisation to protect the interest of the settlers, sprang up challenging the state to implement the Act if it dared to. In the face of a well-organised orchestration, the State government readily declared, in early April 1994, that the Act would be suitably amended and announced in the Assembly that it had requested permission from the President of India to amend the Act. Lack of funds could not be advanced as an excuse because, if the State government made a requisition, the Central government was bound to provide grant-in-aid from the Consolidated Fund at its disposal. It was the responsibility of the State and it was duty-bound to make the request. However, no request for funds was made by the State government.

### **The KST amendment Bill 1999**

The responsibility for creating such a sorry state of affairs solely rests with the apathy of

political parties of all hues and the delaying tactics employed by the successive governments which kept the Tribal Land Act of 1975 in cold storage for almost 25 years. Ironically enough the Act was sought to be amended 1996 and again in 1999 not for protection of the tribesfolk, but for protection of the encroachers of tribal land.

The Government promised that the KST Amendment Bill, which came up for consideration of the Kerala Assembly in September 1999, would cater to the interests of settlers, farmers, and tribesfolk in equal measure. It also declared that it would be spending at least Rs 32 cr from the public ex-chequer to buy land for the tribesfolk in lieu of their alienated land. In other words, this much money was proposed to be spent for regularising the transactions by which the settlers got possession of tribal land.

The tribal leader C. K. Janu from Wayanad referred to the move of reselling the tribesfolk and asked: “why can’t the government shift the settlers? The tribesfolk are the original people in the area, whereas the settlers are immigrants. The very lifestyle of the tribesfolk is deeply entrenched with the setting. We will not be able to survive as a people if we are uprooted from these areas... Let them (government) give land to the settlers in alternative places and give a compensation of Rs 100,000 instead of Rs 25,000 offered to us. We would not mind even if the money for paying compensation to the settlers is taken from the funds earmarked for the tribal welfare schemes. Actually we can demand rent from the settlers who have usurped our land and have been cultivating it for years, but we are not demanding that. At least we must be allowed to live in the area where we were born, where our forefathers were living. If the Kerala Assembly passed the new bill unanimously, this only means that all the political parties are united in their plans to cheat the tribesfolk” (The Hindu, 1999).

When USHAS interviewed a few settlers in 1987 they were found happy with the clause that the government were willing to pay compensation for the improvement they made on the land. They expressed their willingness to hand over the property. But the government was not serious in the implementation of this clause.

The 1999 Bill sought to reverse this position by providing for compensation to tribesfolk using public money. The government would acquire alternative sites for the alienated lands of tribesfolk, for up to one hectare; if the alienated area exceeded one hectare, the tribal people would have to share the cost with the government. A decision was yet to be taken on how much the farmers owning more than one hectare would be paid. The government indicated that this would correspond to the market value of the land. The financial memorandum attached to the Bill introduced in the Assembly stated thus: “the actual expenditure that may be involved from the consolidated fund of the state by way of financial assistance for the implementation for the provisions of the Bill cannot be estimated with any reasonable degree of accuracy at this stage” (Roy Mathew, 1999).

K. E. Ismael, the then Revenue Minister commended that the 1999 Bill was a consolation to the settlers and assuring of justice to the tribesfolk. The rehabilitation was not based on the living conditions of the tribesfolk and for ascertaining their living conditions a special officer was proposed to be appointed for different tribal areas who would prepare special projects (The Hindu, 1999; Malayala Manorama, 1999).

In Attappady, the government possessed only 300 acres of land and the extent of land to be given back by the settlers was 3345 acres. The rest is forestland, but the Environmental Department at the Centre did not give permission to use the forestland. In order to get more than 3000 acres of forestland, the government had to obtain the consent of the Centre. (Ibid) What the tribesfolk needed was agricultural land. The land in the possession of the government was not suitable for cultivation either.

### **Restoration of land to tribesfolk**

The only reason why the government has shown any interest in restoring land to tribesfolk is saving itself from contempt of court proceedings for not implementing the Tribal Land Act of 1975. The government, which spoke much about the welfare of the tribesfolk/ tribal development, is basically violating the fundamental rights of the tribesfolk. After uprooting them from their own land and culture, would the patchwork of “development” help the tribesfolk for upkeeping their identity and self-reliance? In 1976 the State Planning Board had pointed out to the ITDP of Attappady, that “Land alienation and dispossession of land that have taken place over the past two-three decades is the most important problem facing them (tribesfolk) today. Such deprivation has struck at the very roots of their economic base and social cohesion”, and suggested as a strategy to restore the alienated land, speedy implementation of the Act. Menon Commission repeated the same strategy as a major component for tribal development. In spite of all these repeated pointers the government has not only failed to implement land restoration for the tribesfolk, but also tried to amend the Act and thus shied away from one of the basic aims of ITDP.

K. Panoor states thus: “History will not be able to forgive this great crime done against the tribesfolk of Kerala. Large scale alienation from their land is the major reason for the marginalisation”. In this process, the worst hit are the tribal women.

### **Human right violation**

By its land policy the Government has cut the very roots of the tribesfolk, the “original inhabitants.” The government’s stand shows that it is the source of provocation of tension between the settlers and tribesfolk. Its land policy clearly is pro-settlers.

It is a fundamental requirement for justice that people should have the right to the means of subsistence and the right to live in a community, which, for tribesfolk means the right to their traditional territories and the natural resources with which they have a special relationship. The violation of this right not only means the disruption of lifestyles and the destruction of communities, but also constitutes ethnocide. Their right to protest is continuously violated with out-right coercion and loss of liberty and life. Finally, the right to self-determination, which stems from the values of freedom and equality, are also denied.

## **Appendix to Section 5**

The following case studies are presented with the intention of giving a clear idea about the types of transactions through which the tribesfolk of Attappady had lost their lands to the settlers and how they regained some land later.

### **1. Mondri of Gonjiyoor**

Mondri (65) from Gonjiyoor hamlet of Sholayoor panchayat had leased three acres of his land to a Tamil settler named Kantaswamy for Rs 100 per acre in 1968. Before signing the paper Mondri was treated to a generous supply of alcohol as expected. He became drunk and signed the papers without bothering to know what was written therein. In return Mondri was given Rs 10 and was promised payment in kind of the balance of Rs 290 for the lease of the land. When Mondri came back to his normal and sober self, he realised that he had been duped in the land transaction. He regretted his foolishness, but there was no way of getting out of the consequences; what he wanted was money not salt, an ingredient that the tribesfolk use only to a lesser degree than non-tribesfolk. At the same time they had to go to Thadagam which is about 30 km away from Gonjiyoor, for purchasing salt. But he had no choice and all that he got at different times was salt worth about Rs 75. He was given neither the balance of the money to which he was entitled nor given back the land. The irony of the situation was that Mondri worked as labourer in his own land that he leased out to a settler. USHAS intervened and enabled Mondri to get back his land in 1985.

### **2. Boodham of Vechappathy**

Boodham of Vechappathy had 4.40 acres of land in survey no. 1798/3. This land was given on lease to Kuppaswamy Gownder, son of Marappa Gownder, for two years. Kuppaswamy Gownder treated the land as his own and refused to return it to Boodham after the expiry of the lease period. Boodham filed a case against Kuppaswamy Gownder in 1992 in the Munsiff court of Mannarkkad. On 16 September 1996, an ex parte judgement was passed. But Boodham was afraid to occupy the land. FMM sisters from Ushas with a few tribespeople backed Boodham. The village officer was called to measure the encroached land to set the boundary. They had to seek the help of police during the survey. Soon after this with the help of eight tribal youth consisting of both, men and women, sisters of USHAS and Boodham's family put the fence around this land and put up a small hut for Boodham to live in there from that very day. From the next day onwards Kuppaswamy Gownder threatened Boodham in several ways, even getting other tribesfolk to join against Boodham. The continued support and follow up helped Boodham to stay there, cultivate the land, and earn a living. This is one of the few cases in which a tribesman succeeded in getting back his land.

### **3. Nanchan of Sholayoor**

The following case study illustrates the indifference on the part of the government in the implementation of the 1975 Act. An application under section 6(2) of the KST Act was submitted by Nanchan, son of Ipputtiyam, the Attukkaran of Varagampady-Sholayoor area for the restora-



tion to him of the four acres of land situated in survey no. 1378/pt of the Sholayoor village previously owned and possessed by him. The case was posted for hearing on 7 June 1995. The order was that the transaction was deemed to be invalid under section 5 of the Act and that the applicant was entitled to restoration of possession of the immovable property.

The respondent was eligible to get compensation under section II (1) of the Act. Accordingly, the application, Nanchan was directed to pay an amount of Rs 4000 being the aggregate of the actual amount of consideration received by him at the time of the transfer and the cost of improvements made after the transfer. According to the Tribal Land Act, the government was supposed to pay the amount and the tribesperson was to repay the amount received in instalments. But in Attukkaren's case it did not happen. Hence Ushas encouraged Attukkaren to pay the whole amount by himself immediately and get back the land. He went to the RDO with the required amount. The RDO asked Attukkaran to give the amount to the Tahasildhar. He went to the Tahasildhar's office with the amount and the Tahasildhar instructed them to pay the amount at the village office. When we went to the village office the officer's reply was that he has no order to receive the money and settle the matter. Attukkaren spent almost Rs 2000 (two thousand) for travel alone to repay the amount Rs 4000 and to get back his land. Instead of giving his land back the dependent Rajamma filed a case against Attukkaren in the Mannarkad Munisiff court. As a result he appears in the court almost every month.

In between the Chief Minister of Kerala issued pattayams to more than a hundred tribesfolk in Attappady. According to Attukkaren he thought that the pattayam given to him was for his own lands. Only later did he understand that the pattayam was for some other land not of his own alienated land. One of the staff of the village office of Sholayoor panchayat compelled him to receive the above pattayam. Attukkaran was forced to make his thumb impression on a document even though Attukkaran knows to make a signature. Recently the police threatened Attukkaran to 'give back' the land to Rajamma, the defendant.

## **6. Development Programmes in Attappady**

The development programmes were approached in three different ways. Information was gathered from the research workers and the study group and also from the hamlets under study. For the government development programmes, the personnel of the offices of ITDP and of the government departments of Soil Conservation and Housing were interviewed.

### **Tribal hamlets under study**

Sholayoor *Panchayat* was formed in 1968. It has an area of 150.76 sq. km and is situated at 750 metres above MSI. Sholayoor is rich in magnesium and mica. The panchayat has 8174 hectare (ha) of forest and 25849 hectare of non-forest land. Cultivable land is 11275 ha of which 75 percent is under private plantations. About 600 ha come under cultivable wasteland (Panchayat, 1997). In Attappady only 17.4 percent of the non-forest area is cultivated, out of which 10.42 percent is under private plantation. Nearly, two-thirds of the area comes under wastelands. The Krishi Bhavan of Sholayoor was started in 1989. A recent study shows that (CSRDM of 1997) there are 2658 agriculturists and 2663 agricultural labourers in this area. Sholayoor has 10633 buffalos and cattle, 8010 Sheep and goats, 10969 fowls and ducks, and 36 pigs.

There are two high schools of which one is a government tribal school. There are five government primary schools; two of them are tribal schools with Tamil medium and two UP schools, one Tamil medium. Recently, a few DPEP centres have been started. There are 7132 literates. For health care, there are one PHC sub-centre, one homeopathy centre two Ayurvedic centres with a total of five doctors in all.

### **Demographic structure and settlement pattern**

Sholayoor has a total population of 25, 789, out of which the tribal population is 7591 (Male 3803, female 3788), less than 30 percent. The total population of Sholayoor in 1961 was 8141 and it increased to 25789 in 1991. In 1981 Sholayoor had 41 percent tribesfolk in its population. There are 56 Oorus in the panchayat; the five Oorus under study consist of 494 households. The tribal population [Varagampady (652), Gonjiyoor (255), Vechapathy (359), Oothukuzhi (532), and Moolaganagal (114)] comes to 1912 in the sample Oorus constitutes one-fourth of the total tribal population of the Sholayoor *panchayat*.

Of the 50 households surveyed 45 had tiled houses constructed by the government. The houses have two rooms each, one of which is used as the kitchen. The floor is plastered by mud and cow dung. There is a small veranda attached to the main structure. The livestock population in these hamlets comprises cattle, goats, poultry, and birds. Eight kulams are identified from the five hamlets of study. Out of the 50 households 18 belong to Karattika kulam, 11 to Vellaka, 7 to Kurunagar, 6 to Sambar, 3 to Kuppy, 2 to Perathar, 1 each to Arumoop and Devanar.

**Table 6.1 Population and Households of the Hamlets of Sholayoor Panchayat**

Hamlets	Tribal Population	Male	Female	No. of Households
Gonjiyoor	255	133	122	75
Moolagangal	359	202	17	89
Oothykuzhi	114	61	53	37
Varagampady	532	259	273	135
Vechapapthy	652	340	312	158
Total	1912	995	917	487
Sholayoor Panchayat	7591	3803	3788	2114

**Table 6.2 Population and Households of the Hamlets of Sholayoor Panchayat**

Hamlets	Male	Female	Total	Population in the Hamlet
Gonjiyoor	27	24	51	255
Moolagangal	21	13	34	114
Oothykuzhi	21	27	48	652
Varagampady	25	23	48	532
Vechapapthy	20	23	43	359
Total 114	110	224	1912	
Sholayoor Panchayat	3803	3788	7591	-
Attappady	12180	12048	24228	-

Gonjiyoor got its name because of the presence of 'Goncha' tree in the area.

Moolagangal lies at the corner (moola) of the panchayat, and there is a big rock nearby.

Oothykuzhi situates in between two hills and a water source (Ootukuzhi) is found here.

Varagampady got its name from the plenty of varagu (ragee), a coarse cereal.

Vechapapthy has reference to Veche tree found in this hamlet.

### Land Holding Pattern

Out of a total of 5262 tribal families in Attappady 458 families (9.1 percent) are landless. Of the 50 sample households, 6 are landless (Oothukuzhi-2, Mollagangal – 3, and Varagampady – 1). Of a total 414.43 acres which these 50 households had owned (Table 9), they have lost 146 acres (35.2 percent). Among the five hamlets, Varagampady lost more than half their land (53.1 percent) and Gonjiyoor seems to be the least loser (20.4 percent). The land lost is irrigated and fertile. Most of the land the tribesfolk hold at present lack irrigation facilities and are unfertile.

Of the 50 households 23 lost their lands to outsiders (46 percent). Out of the 146 acres of the land lost, 88.5 acres were sold, 50 acres were leased out, and 7.5 acres were encroached. The amounts received in the transactions varied from Rs 10 to Rs 2000. Only 10 acres of lost land have been restored. Out of the 23 outsiders who got the tribal land, 20 were Tamil settlers and 3 settlers from Kerala.

**Table 6.3 Land Holding Pattern of 50 Householdss under Study (in acres)**

Hamlets	Cultivated	Uncultivated	Total	Lost	Total
Gonjiyoor	28.43	49.75	78.18	20 (20.37%)	98.18
Moolagangal	13	16.05	29.05	16 (35.52%)	45.05
Oothykuzhi	26.45	33	59.45	30.5(3.91%)	89.95
Varagampady	30.75	18.5	49.25	60.5 (55.13%)	109.75
Vechapapthy	23.5	29	52.5	19 (36.57%)	71.5
Total % of total land	122.13 (45.5%)	146.3 (54.5%)	268.43	146.00 (35.23%)	414.43

At present 268.43 acres of land is owned by the 50 sample households with an average of 5.37 acres. The total cultivated land in the five Oorus by the sample households together is 122.13 acres (45.5 percent). Owing a variety of reasons 146.3 acres (54.5 percent) out of 268.43 acres are left uncultivated. The most important reason for leaving land uncultivated was lack of finance. Disturbance from wild animals was mentioned as the second highest obstacle.

The major crops cultivated were coarse cereals such as Ragi and Maize, and the tribesfolk seldom use chemical fertilisers.

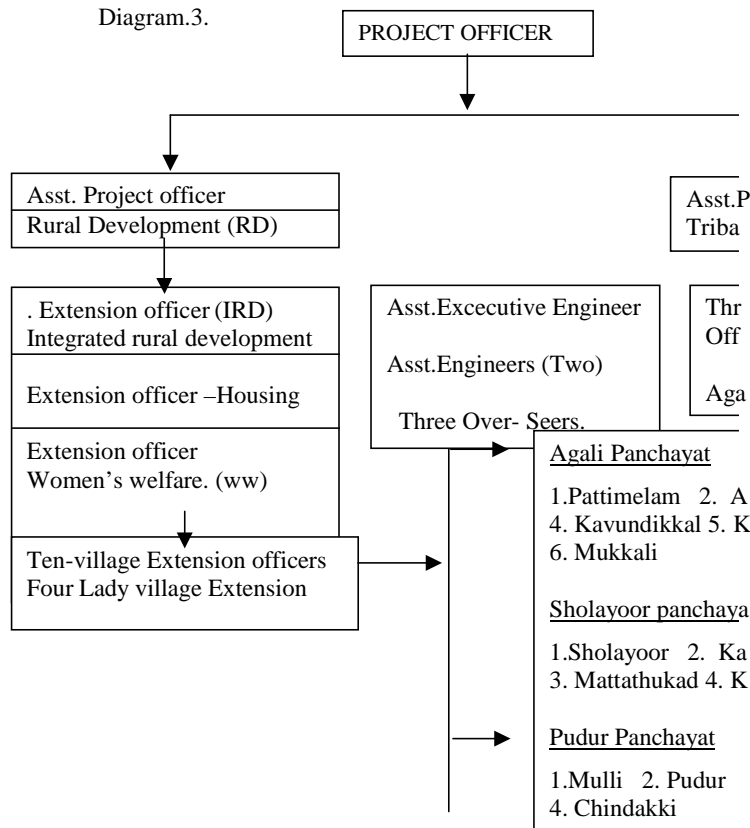
### **Integrated Tribal Development Programmes in Attappady**

In April 1957 an integrated programme of intensive development of tribal areas was introduced in India in the form of multi-purpose blocks. The programme aimed at improving irrigation, agriculture, land reclamation, soil conservation, animal husbandry, rural housing, rural arts and crafts, health and sanitation, communication, and education. Land restoration was one of the major aims of starting Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP). Together with these functions the block was so designed as to bestow special attention to the affairs of the tribes and work for effective amelioration of their social, cultural, and economic problems. The institution was expected to participate in the various developmental activities with the know-how and the effective co-operation of its technical and administrative personnel. For effective field-work 14 trained Gramasevikas were attached to each tribal block. During Second Five-Year Plan 43 tribal blocks were opened in various States having ST concentration. The basic criterion adopted was that the blocks should have an area of 220 sq miles and a population of about 25,000 and that two-thirds of the population should be tribesfolk.

Organised efforts for development of Attappady were started only since 1961, with the introduction of the national extension service. The first tribal block in Kerala came into existence on 1 April 1962. In 1975, Attappady Tribal Block was renamed Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP). The hierarchical structure of ITDP is shown in the chart below.

The major activities undertaken by ITDP are classified as 13 programmes such as Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Jawhar Rosgar Yojana (JRY), DWCRA, Integrated Waste Land Development Project (IWDP), Indira Avas Yojana (IAY), Community Development Programme (CDP), Central Rural Sanitary Programme (CRSP), Ganga Kalyan Yojana

**The structure of ITDP**  
Diagram.3.



(GKY), EAS, Attappady Valley Development Project (AVDP), Ten Million Well Scheme (MWS), TRYSM, and MWS (Housing). The total expenditure right from the inception of the Block works out Rs 2400 lakh.

During the Eighth Five-Year Plan period ITDP spent Rs 1363 lakh for 1124 families in Attappady. Out of this, the tribal families were only 611 and SCs 133. The total amount allotted through various departments was Rs 1884.72 lakh. During the Eighth Plan period, the tribal development department allotted Rs 75,000 for marriages in the tribal community.

These programmes and projects are seen to have benefited only to handful of officials, contractors, and middlemen who are mainly settlers. The tribesfolk, especially the women, are more and more reduced to poverty and misery to the extent of extinction. The net result of the government development programmes are that the tribesfolk who are forced into the rat race of consumerism and market economy are defeated and impoverished. They become beggars, mental patients, alcoholics, drug addicts, coolies, slaves, and bonded labourers.

The development programmes and policies have, to a great extent, degraded and alienated the tribal women in a special way. "In spite of all the development activities during the last three and a half decades after independence, the tribesfolk continue to remain in the lowest strata of

society. It is true that only through realistic planning and effective implementation of various developmental programmes, the problem can be solved” (A Bench mark survey of ITDP in Kerala, 1982).

The State Planning Board made a study in 1976 of regional disparities in development for formulating the Fifth Five-Year Plan. The development constraints of tribesfolk identified in this study were the following:

1. Land alienation
2. Loss of sources of subsistence of the tribal communities;
3. Lack of housing conditions;
4. Low income;
5. Low literacy; and
6. Lack of communication facilities.

A benchmark survey conducted in 1982 pointed out the following shortcomings about the ITDP, (1) Ignorance, negligence, and malades; (2) Lack of sensitivity to tribal involvement, and (3) Lack of tribal involvement.

CWRDM in 1996 classified the major problems of tribesfolk as poverty, illiteracy, and exploitation by middlemen, unemployment and abuse of alcohol. They pointed out the following weakness in the programmes of tribal development.

1. Inadequate understanding on the part of planning about organised tribal development;
2. Unscientific resource planning;
3. Distorted programme implementation;
4. Lack of organised monitoring and evaluation systems;
5. Poor co-ordination between developmental departments and agencies;
6. Lack of involvement of people in programmes due to inadequate transparency;
7. Poor budgetary resources;

Various communities and commissions have pointed out from 1976 onwards the drawbacks in government developmental efforts. The State Planning Board and the Benchmark Survey strongly recommended speedy implementation of the tribal and legislation and restoration of the lands to the tribesfolk. Yet, the drawbacks remain unabated.

### **Development programmes in the hamlets under study**

SWOL (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Limitations) Analysis was done at the workshop to assess the government development programmes in the hamlets under study. The participants were asked to share what development activities they regarded as successful (Strengths), unsuccessful (Weakness), what had rendered possible (Opportunities) and what they would have liked the government to do, and which was at this moment impossible (Limitations). The Strengths and Weakness were then prioritised to find out what they regarded as the best achievements and the biggest failures and the why of it.

## **Department of Agriculture**

An Agricultural Officer with the minimum supporting staff is in charge of Agricultural department in each panchayat. Since there are three panchayats, three Krishi Bhavans function in Attappady under the control of a Block-level Assistant Director. The schemes aim at improving both the productivity and the production of cultivated crops. The cropping pattern in Attappady is highly diversified. The eastern slopes have dry land agriculture and the western slopes are mainly under rain-fed agriculture.

One of the most important sectors of attention of ITDP has been agriculture. During 1992-1997, Rs 302.5 lakh have been spent mainly in the form of grants and subsidies for purchase of hybrid seedlings, fertilisers, pesticides, pump sets, and implements. Hybrid seedlings require as inputs chemical fertilisers and pesticides and water in large quantities. Chemical fertilisers and pesticides are provided at subsidised rates. The programmes of Krishi Bhavan forced the tribesfolk to make use of the above inputs. Since the budgetary sources for the agriculture sector were limited, the department could not take up any massive programme. The dry land agriculture programmes were limited to individual beneficiaries. Over Rs 300 lakh have been spent by the Agricultural Department during the Eighth Five-Year Plan period for 3000 persons in Attappady. More than the tribal population, settlers were the beneficiaries of the agricultural programmes. The Benchmark Survey conducted in 1982 had reported that "the impact of these (economic) development programmes on the tribal population was practically nil". Ragee and Chama cultivation should be encouraged in the uncultivated land of all the five hamlets. Cultivation of these crops is comparatively inexperienced and not much irrigation is needed for them if cultivated during the rainy season. Ragee and Chama are less starchy and rich in iron and other nutrients. Today most of the tribesfolk suffer from anaemia. Consumption of these cereals would reduce anaemia incidence. For cultivating these cereals, the tribesfolk use no chemicals and pesticides. The development programmes could aim at this sort of agriculture in the tribal areas of Attappady.

Bank loans through Krishi Bhavan and the Animal Husbandry Department have created havoc. Chemical fertilisers and pesticides are provided freely and at subsidized rates. Tribesfolk who get the loans or grants are compelled to use the fertilisers and pesticides. Hybrid seeds are distributed freely as an incentive. Tribesfolk are thus forced to set aside their traditional seed varieties which they have sustained for ages. For example in Vechappathy, banana seedlings, fertilisers, and pesticides were given freely to tribesfolk. Since no irrigation facility was available, almost all the plants perished. Besides, the land they were cultivating with traditional food crops was left uncultivated. Some times, the settlers encourage the tribesfolk to take all the grants, subsidies, and incentives in order to purchase them from the tribesfolk at low prices. For cotton cultivation, merchants/middle men / agents from outside the area give the tribesfolk loans on condition that the produce would be given to the lenders at stipulated prices.

This study revealed that 40 of the sample households have their own cattle or goats. Cattle-dung and ash are available with them for use as a manure. The preservers of the traditional seed varieties could be encouraged to cultivate the traditional food crops like Chame, Rage, Tina, and Maize and a variety of leafy and other green vegetables which the tribesfolk are very much at home with. This sort of food intake had kept them healthy, strong, and self-reliant for ages.

Their way of cultivating was eco-friendly. This cultivation did not need much water either. The Krishi Bhavan or the agricultural department programmes need to encourage and help the tribesfolk to practise their traditional agriculture which is less expensive and more productive than the modern methods especially in an area where there is less water and electricity. Over 60 percent of the wasteland could be made available if incentives, grants, and subsidies are planned in a way that respects culture, values, and agricultural practices of the tribesfolk. The following are the major conclusions of the SWOL analysis on agriculture.

### **Findings**

1. Organic farming practised by the tribesfolk sustained the land and nature intact; the tribesfolk are being compelled to change their cultivating practices in the name of increasing production and development;
2. In the process, the tribesfolk get alienated from their cultural ethos and values
3. The free distribution of hybrid seeds progressively replaces traditional seeds;
4. Instead of giving fertilisers and pesticides, it would have been more beneficial to the tribesfolk if bullocks and ploughs were given to them;
5. Providing irrigation facilities for a hamlet as a whole would be more practical since the farming lands lie contiguously; and
6. The tribesfolk are in dire need of a proper and dependable marketing system for their products.

### **Land**

The tribal land policy of the government is unjust and unfavourable to tribesfolk. The lands allotted to them under the Tribal Land Amendment Bill of 1999 are uncultivable barren or rocky areas situated far away from their hamlets.

### **Soil conservation**

The Soil Conservation unit of the Agriculture Department of Attappady forms the catchment area of Kundha Project (in Tamil Nadu) and came under the Centrally-sponsored scheme namely Soil Conservation in the Catchments of R.V.P. Kundha (Kerala Portion). The project was commissioned in 1967-1968 and completed during 1998. Sustainable production in the agricultural sector and employment generation were the objectives of the project. A total area of 30,000 hectares has been brought under soil conservation measures, at a total cost of Rs 1300 lakh during the project period. In addition, 3.5 hectares of tribal land were protected by the Soil Conservation Office of Palakkad under a tribal development programme spending a sum of Rs one lakh. The programmes executed were structure-oriented; vegetation conservation techniques were not seriously taken up. Adoption of a package of practices with both vegetation-related and structural measures and scientifically planned and implemented, is essential.

### **Irrigation**

The area estimated by the Minor Irrigation Department in Attappady is 32,889 hectares of



which land under cultivation is 23,500 hectare only. A total amount of Rs 170 lakh has been spent under six categories of programmes during past 10 years. Moisture conservation with appropriate cropping pattern is the only alternative for the drought-affected eastern Attappady. In the hills, the check dams constructed are not able to reach out to the top areas. In each Ooru, tanks to pump water into the agricultural land are required. Thus the water scarcity problem could be solved.

### Housing

Secondary data show that during the Eighth Five-Year Plan period, 463 houses were constructed. The amount spent was Rs 112.65 lakh in Attappady. Out of them only 88 houses were completed. According to a Block report, out of 5262 tribal households 3400 households have no proper housing (Plan Report, 1997-2002).

The number of houses constructed under the various schemes during the Eighth Plan period, are as shown below in Table 6.4.

In Gonjiyoor hamlet 10 households have houses constructed by the government during the Eighth Five-Year Plan period. For Vechappathy 25 houses were granted but only 10 houses were completed at the end of the Plan Period. The remaining three hamlets did not get any housing during this Plan period, but there were repairs. Except very few households 3-6 percent, all the remaining households have government houses. But almost 50 percent of the houses require repairs.

**Table 6.4 Houses Construction for Tribesfolk during the Eighth Five year plan**

Suggested Goals					Achiev
Year	Number	Amount (in Rs lakh)	Number	Others	House Comp
1992-93	101	18.995	108	-	23
1993-94	116	16.820	101	-	15
1994-95	155	24.334	82	32	37
1995-96	281	44.398	83	33	169
1996-97	144	31.680	12	11	131
Total	797	136.227	386	77	375

In every hamlet, houses were constructed under the schemes. Half the houses constructed are badly in need of repairs. One-third of the houses remain incomplete. Even now more than half of the households in the five hamlets do not have proper housing. Houses were not constructed to suit the climatic conditions of the area and cultural traits and economic requirements of the people. In order to get houses they have to go several times to the offices of the government and bribe the officials. It is the contractors who profited a lot from the housing scheme. In most of the cases the construction of a house took more than a year. During the construction period the tribesfolk had to build temporary huts since it was on the sites of their demolished

house that the new buildings were being constructed.

### **Drinking water**

Sixty-five hamlets were provided drinking water by constructing bore-wells and dug-wells. The Water Authority covered 26 hamlets. The CWRDM study on the Causes of Degradation and Desertification Tendencies in the Attappady Region stated thus: “the major problem encountered in the valley was scarcity of water for drinking and food production. The condition of the local inhabitants especially the tribesfolk is highly deplorable. Since 1962, a number of programmes have been launched and implemented by the government through agencies such as tribal block and ITDP to improve the economic condition of the tribesfolk. But it neither improved their economic conditions nor brought them to their original conditions, rather it increased their dependence on governmental agencies. The per capita income shows that they are living below poverty line”.

**Table 6.5 Format the Tribesfolk Used for Self-Evaluation of Drinking Water Availability in Oothukuzhi**

<b>Information provided through imaginary tool</b>			<b>Inform through</b>
<b>Development Activity</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Result</b>
Drinking Water	Make clean water available	Clean water available	Five tanks to be constructed in the village often
	Water sources Provided Close to people's homes	Water taps Constructed in the hamlet	Two out of five tanks broken
	Reduction of diseases	Fewer people will have diarrhoea	It is clear fewer people suffer from diarrhoea

In all the five hamlets there is drinking water supply. Moolagangal and Gonchiyoor have water stored in tanks in the Ooru itself and a few taps are attached to the tanks for taking water. In Oothukuzhi, Varagampady, and Vechapapthy pipe connections are provided from the tanks in the Ooru with three to four taps each for the whole hamlet. In Gonchiyoor taps are not functioning for the past two years. In Vechapapthy two taps are non-functional. One of the four taps in Varagampady is leaking and all the time the water is gushing out. Tanks that are constructed in the Ooru are neither cleaned nor medicated. In some cases water gushes out and the ground gets muddy and slushy causing unhygienic conditions and inconvenience. Water also gets stagnated and breeds mosquitoes.

### **Field insights / assessment / suggestions**

The positive factor is that there is drinking water supply in all the hamlets under study. Maintenance of the facility is neglected. No follow-up is being done. A few persons say one or two persons including even women from each hamlet could be trained in plumbing / repairing and could be provided with tools and materials needed for the repairs. Thus repairs could be done as and when required. This would avoid allocation of large funds for repairs by the government departments. The tribesfolk themselves could be taught to manage the whole drinking water supply system in their hamlets, as the storage system in all the hamlets except Varagampady is in the streams adjacent to the hamlets concerned.

### **Electricity**

During the Eighth Five-Year Plan period, the Electricity Section of this area spent a total sum of Rs 49 lakh. Electricity is available only for 26 hamlets out of 176 hamlets. Poor energy facilities prohibit commencement of any industry; also the paucity of power is reflected in irrigation.

Only two of the five hamlets under study are electrified. Only 10 of the 50 sample households in the 5 hamlets have electric connections. Street electric lights for the public are provided in two hamlets. Often these lights are non-functional. The Integrated Habitat Development Scheme (IHD) in Vechappathy has provided solar lights, but only for 15 households. Of the 15 solar lights – one each per household – at present only 5 are functional. Gonjiyoor and Varagampady are electrified; but lack of adequate voltage and continuous power cut often keep the hamlet in darkness. The supply of electric power is disrupted almost entirely during the monsoon season.

### **Integrated Child Development Schemes (ICDS)**

The Scheme commenced in 1978-'79. The aim was general uplift of child health, imparting training to mothers on childcare etc. The Expenditure for 1996-'97 was less than 27 lakh. The presence of Anganvadi in the hamlets is welcomed by the tribesfolk. All the hamlets have Anganvadis.

### **Education**

Only Vechappathy has an LP School within the hamlet. For Moolagangal an LP School is 9 km away; for U.P. and High School the children have to walk a distance of 13 km. The distance to the nearest LP School is 3 km in Ottukuzhy, 2.5 km in Ganjiyoor, and 2 km in Vaagampady. The primary schools opened by the Education Department exist only in name. In these schools only one teacher is appointed against the requirement of four. The teachers take no pains to see these schools functioned properly. The tribal hostels in Attappady for girls and for boys at Agali function very badly.

Of the 10 school dropouts interviewed the main reasons for stopping the studies emerged were failure, difficulty in learning the language, teasing by non-tribal students, misunderstanding by teachers, financial difficulty at home, and need to help the family. Very few tribesfolk have passed SSLC. Most of them failed and almost all of them have turned to wage labour. A few

incidents of alienation from the tribal society as a result of getting educated also were pointed out. Some of the educated find it difficult to adjust with either the tribal life or the mainstream life. According to the survey conducted by Namu (a tribal organisation meaning 'We'), "The rate of psychological illness is on the increase today in Attappady.

Literacy programmes were started in 1990 and about 1300 persons were made literate under the Akshara Kerala Programme. The second phase began in 1991 and a total of 7170 persons were declared literates.

As agriculture affects every other aspect of tribal life, making an educational programme around agriculture has multiple advantages in this context.

Proper planning, follow-up and getting the participation of the tribesfolk, especially women in all the processes of development seem to be very essential. This would avoid to a great extent the wastage of human and material resources. On the other hand it enhances sustainable, eco-friendly, and participatory development.

### **Ration shops**

With the establishment of ration shops in Attappady, there is switching away from the traditional cereals such as Raagi and Chama and tubers such as Yam. Cultivation of traditional food crops has consequently diminished.

### **Tribal farm**

Conomic system and a development model that is in opposition to the tribal ethos and life. This model has been at variance with tribal practices and culture and their relationship with nature. The process of rapid opening up of the tribal areas for expropriation of resources has intensified. These resources were considered by the immigrants belong to the government and that the tribesfolk had no right over them. Moreover, they have established their monopoly on these resources via enforcement of laws in their favour enacted in the name of national interest.

The economic agenda, centering around the development of urban-industrial areas through the rapid utilisation of natural resources, consisted in building large dams and mines, exploiting forests for the market, building large industrial complexes close to the source of raw materials and opening up the area for trade, commerce and tourism. As the bulk of the nation's resources lay in the tribal territories, the burden of nation-building was placed on the tribesfolk. The benefits of this process were on the other hand lapped up by the elite and the well-to-do.

The constitutional arrangements provide for protection and promotion of the interests of tribesfolk, including special political arrangements of practical autonomy, or of potential autonomy that is specific in some areas and not so specific in others. However, the dominant national system and institutions of governance and decision-making, which penetrated into tribal areas and proliferated, have proved themselves to be direct conflict with the tribesfolk' traditional institutions and ways of life. The government has a responsibility to ensure that all the development projects make effective and sustainable use of natural resources and to encourage and broaden

the scope of meaningful community participation in the planning, developing, and implementation of such projects, thereby recognising and protecting the rights of Adivasi communities and fostering the practice of cross-communal partnership.

International institutions like the World Bank have wreaked havoc upon tribal life with its policies, whilst the state and the larger society have led to further pauperisation and ethnocide of these people. Only a quarter of the displaced tribesfolk have been given alternative (though non-irrigable) land; one-third of them have not received any compensation at all. Compensation is assured for only those few tribesfolk who had acquired legal title to land. The majority of them (about 70 percent) did not have land titles.

After impoverishing the tribesfolk, the government gives the tribesfolk some relief in the form of reservation to education and jobs. Integrated Tribal Development Plans are also implemented. However, the government is not prepared to deal with the causes of their impoverishment. Even these few relief measures are not implemented properly. Efforts are made to reduce their numbers or to deprive them of benefits. For example, in many programmes non-tribesfolk appropriate the benefits reserved for the tribesfolk through fraud.

While talking of Tribal Development one has to redefine the concept of development in the specificities of tribal society. All plans for development have greater chances of success if the relevant cultural and social factors are taken into account while formulating plans and programmes. Imposition of ideas and values of the planners or policy-makers as well as their own priorities on the tribal society without taking due note of the specific cultural tracts and their felt needs may frustrate the very purpose of the policy.

### **Impact of development programmes on the tribesfolk of Attappady**

A fundamental weakness of tribal development programmes and strategies lies in the fact that the people for whom development is indented are not involved. The area development programmes have not benefited tribal communities in the past. The programme for the welfare and development of the tribal people has had only a limited coverage.

### **Exploitation and enslavement from money-lenders and middlemen**

The tribesfolk get paltry prices for the forest produce which they sell such as wax, honey, and medicinal herbs. However, high prices are charged for all the things that the tribesfolk buy for their daily lives. The tribesfolk borrow money from moneylenders by pledging their standing crop. In the promissory notes they sign and give to the lenders, the amount recorded may be three times or four times higher than the actual amount they borrow. Naturally, they fall into a debt-trap from which they seldom get out. The smugglers of sandalwood and timber exploited the destitution of tribesfolk and used them as pawns in the plunder of the forest wealth.

Cutting down trees, especially sandal wood trees is a serious offence against civil law and forest authorities have been authorised to shoot down the law breakers on the spot. The tribesfolk risk their lives by doing the forbidden work at the bidding of the smugglers. They get cheated again when the smugglers underpay them. Besides, when the tribal men go into the

forest for timber-cutting the smugglers who stay back in the tribal hamlets often abuse tribal women sexually. Smuggling goes on with the full support of forest and police personnel and vast acres have been denuded of all forest growth.

In the process, the tribesfolk inculcate, in slow degrees, non-tribal traits. The non-tribesperson with his capital takes ownership and control of the land. Deprived of his land and access to the forest, the tribesperson turns a wage worker on his own land and forest. The landowner tells him what work to do, where to cultivate, and what sort of manure to use. Focused on profit-oriented production cultivation was switched over from food crops to cash crops. Two classes emerged: the new owners (landlords) and the agricultural labourers – the rich and the poor – the leisure class and the labouring class.

In 1985 the women labourers received only Rs 6 per day for agricultural labour that stretched beyond 8 hours. The members of USHAS also received the same when we worked with the tribesfolk. We had been going for coolie work in order to (1) understand the hardships and the working conditions of the tribesfolk, (2) to be in solidarity with them, (3) and to earn our livelihood. We illustrate here our own experience of a day's work with these people. We went for work to the neighbouring settler who owned about 40 acres of land. The work was harvesting of maize. We worked in the field from 8.30 am to 12.30 pm planking corn without any break, except for drinking water and munching the raw corn. At 12.30 pm we were put to work again with the only difference that it was another type of work. The plucked corn was to be carried in head loads of maize in big baskets to the courtyard and then to peel the stacks. The load was heavy and the carrying strenuous. This work was done mostly by the women workers; only the peeling of the corn was light work which we could do sitting. Lunch was served at 1.15 pm. We finished our lunch within 15 minutes and resumed the work. At 5 O'clock we informed the farmer – the employer, that it was time for stopping the work. But he replied that the work had to continue for one more hour as the scheduled time for stopping work was 6 O'clock. So the work continued. At the end of the day, we received Rs 6 for the day's work of nine hours and a half.

On our way back we asked our tribal friends "How many hours did we work today"? The reply was, 'six hours'. Sitting down and peeling corn was not work in their reckoning as it entailed spending of time and not much of energy. The tribalpeople's scale of measurement as regards "time and work" contrasted significantly from that of others. They lived unaware of their rights. In their world of income the bargaining tactics of the outside world had not yet entered.

Women constituted the major part of the tribal labour force, forming nearly 80 percent. Children too play a vital role in the labour force. Women do work as hard as that of men.

From daily routine analysis it was found that all men and women going for wage labour work for about 10 hours per day. Including this work and the household work, the working time for a woman comes to 11-15 hours. Old people also have to work to earn a living, doing household work, grazing cattle or bringing firewood. Tribesfolk who go for estate from Oothukuzhi, Varagampady, Gonjiyoor, and Vechapapthy have to walk for two hours to reach their work place. They have to spend 4 hours per day for walking alone. At present they work from 9 am

to 4 pm with breaks of 5 minutes at 10 am and 10 minutes at noon. Thus after working for 7.45 hours and walking for 4 hours / day they become worn out. For women that is not the end of the day. They pound the grains, do the cooking and serving of food, also look after the children and attend other household chores. It is interesting to note that both men and women form about two-fifths of the tribal families share the household chores especially of fetching firewood and cooking.

### **Migration of Tribesfolk**

In search of work many tribal youth out-migrate to neighbouring towns and cities. They were absorbed into the ways of the mainstream society. The tribal youth get slowly alienated from their traditional social and organisational set-up. Mixed marriages are on the increase. From the hamlet of Varagampady six cases were identified of tribal boys getting married to girls belonging to non-tribal castes, particularly Schedules Castes. Usually, it is girls whose parents who find it difficult to offer dowry, who get married with tribal youth. The dowry culture is, however, taking root in the tribal society, albeit slowly. On the other hand, some men from the mainstream society get married with the tribal women in order to get the latter's lands. There are seven such non-tribal men in the hamlets under study.

### **Impact on the traditional tribal community**

In a traditional community every one worked for others in order to keep the egalitarian structure of the community. Whenever a person was experiencing any difficult situation the other came up with help. The person's difficulty was considered an occasion for others to help him/her. For example, at times of illness of a person who is in need of money, others in the community make a pool of their shares to be offered to the person in need. This practice had kept the tribal community in happiness and solidarity. In a modern community, a need of a person is considered a weak moment for him and others look at it as an opportunity to make profit out of it. The tribal community is slowly imbibing the values of the modern community.

### **Impact of development programmes on women**

Tribal women are the worst sufferers in his process of change. Displacement for development projects has deprived tribesfolk of their land and forests from which much of their food came. To day they have to walk much longer distances than in the past to collect food and fodder. Impoverishment forces women to migrate to towns and cities as domestic servants. Many of them are also lured into prostitution.

Development schemes have effected a thorough change in the socio-economic and cultural life of the tribal women. Private property in land and recognition of husband as the head of the family have created a negative impact on the status of women. Transactions are increasingly made in man's name. Improved facilities of development like transportation, health, housing, and technology have not reached women. Women continued to work hard and have no time to enjoy the fruits of development. Mechanisation in agriculture has pushed back women and men have come to the fore.

Job classification into unskilled and skilled has created gender inequality. Women's work is considered unskilled and unproductive in the market sense.

“The process of de-linking tribesfolk from the natural resources goes hand in hand with the transfer of control over these resources and their economy itself to the non-tribesfolk. Apart from the loss of control over their livelihood this results in their integration with the mainstream society that considers tribal women not as equals but as subordinates” (Walter Fernandez, 1993). Implications for women had followed from the communitarian and egalitarian character of these communities. Egalitarian ideology and its triple implications, such as division of work based on it, respect for material resources, and its conservation-oriented culture, have changed in a drastic way. Development programmes were in effect only dodging programmes. The intervention of contractors in development works made tribesfolk non-participants in the implementation of development programmes.

### **Atrocities on women in Attappady**

In the name of development, women have to be at the beck and call of officials and contractors.

When development programmes are allotted to women, they have to go to various offices to get the programmes sanctioned. Some women had undergone sexual abuse at the hand of officers. In order to get grants or subsidies for house construction, and building of cattle-shed women are sometimes forced to oblige to officials. Among the victims of rape and sexual harassment 95 percentages are tribal women and children. In November 1992, within a span of 15 days, six rape cases were reported in Attappady. Of this all the victims were tribesfolk belonging to the age group of 6-16 years. And for the thousands of unreported atrocities on tribal women rape, sexual harassment, murders, only the forests, mountains, and valleys are the sole witnesses.

In the case of mixed marriages, encouraged and promoted by the government even with monetary awards, the settlers who marry tribal women are usually to have wife and children back home. After a period, the settlers go back to their own native places leaving their tribal wives and children to lurch. Among the sexual exploiters of tribal women, a wide range of people are involved the police, government officials, contractors, smugglers, flesh-traders, and immigrant farmers. Consequent on sexual harassment, incidents of death and murder have become common; and almost in every case, the culprits go unpunished. Most murders are registered as cases of suicides.

### **In the working place**

Tribal women are hired as wage workers. They are often taken in groups in lorries and jeeps, to brick-making centres, factories or plantation. They leave their house by 6am and return by 7pm. Most of them walk for an hour to catch the lorry or the jeep. Thus they spend 12-13 hours outside home. They are paid Rs 40-Rs 50 per day. Men and women do the same type of work and sometimes women work much harder; yet the wages of women are much lower than those of men. The government authorities and the law-enforcing officials have remained oblivious to the travails of tribal women.



## **Unwed mothers**

Unwed mothers are on the rise among the tribesfolk of Attappady. A survey conducted in Attappady by 'NAMU' in 1999 identified 345 unwed mothers among them. It was also found that some of the unwed mothers have more than one child. The unwed mothers are comparatively young, in the age group of 16-25 years. The number of unwed mothers is high among the Irular. The men who have exploited them have already deserted them. Some of them had to take to prostitution for survival. Some had become drug addicts (Hindu, 2000).

The experiences of Lakshmi and Vijayalakshmi are cases in point. In Vechappathy, a forest guard promised Ponni (18) that he would marry her, she was deserted by him after getting her a child. The child is 6 years old now. Ponni has joined the group of unwed mothers of Attappady. Ponni tried to get justice by filing a petition to the Sholayoor police station, but it was of no avail. When she enquired about the forest guard who had cheated her, his colleagues feigned ignorance about his whereabouts.

Lakshmi, a charming, beautiful and innocent 15-year-old girl, is left burdened with a 6-year old son. She had finished her SSLC examinations and was waiting results. Her dreams and hopes for the future were shattered when she fell prey to the lust of a settler. A case was filed in court through the action group USHAS; after a long-drawn-out legal struggle, the accused was convicted. Lakshmi had, however, to discontinue her studies and go for work for bringing up her child.

Ponni and Lakshmi are but only two of the hundreds of victims of sexual violence in Attappady.

## 7. Conclusion

A few important issues of the withering tribesfolk, especially tribal women of Attappady are listed below:

1. The tribal society had been once self-reliant. They had a community-based, eco-friendly and self-governing political life till the time outside intervention of the settlers and the government began.
2. Tribal women in traditional tribal society enjoyed great freedom and gender-equality.
3. The government policies on forest land played a vital role in the alienation, and degradation and enslavement of the tribesfolk, especially the tribal woman by turning them into landless agricultural wage labourers.
4. Immigration of people from the plains has played a definite role in the material exploitation of the tribesfolk and the sexual exploitation of their women.
5. The government development programmes were not tribe-specific, gender-specific or participatory.
6. In comparison with the huge amounts spent for the development for the tribesfolk, the outcome is meagre due to lack of effective planning, implementation, and follow-up.
7. Participatory Social Action Research Methods (PSARM) is found useful for awakening of the tribesfolk. These methods enable them to participate in analysing their existing situations and to plan for their own future.
8. Cultivation of the traditional food crops such as Raagi, chama, maize, millet, pulses, and grams to be encouraged in the place of cotton.
9. The agricultural life of the tribesfolk needs to be revitalised; the landless have to be given back their land under the aegis of the government intervention.
10. All the tribal lands alienated from them through fraudulent means or through defective laws should be restored to them or to their descendants, and in the absence of either, to their Ooru (community) as common property.
11. The traditional system of administration that had been dominant among the tribesfolk should be respected and updated instead of imposing alien forms of government on them. Autonomous forms of administration permitted under the fifth and the sixth schedules of the Constitution as well as under other Constitutional provisions should be established with regard to the tribal habitations.
12. In the planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects affecting tribesfolk living conditions and future, tribal participation has to be ensured. Programmes have to be worked out to promote public awareness of the tribal situation and of the threat to the existence of tribesfolk.
13. A balanced approach to development ensuring political, economic, social, and cultural rights of the tribespeople; ensuring them equity and social justice, and fair resource allocation, with particular attention to gender equity has to be evolved.

## **Development of tribesfolk**

In order to give equal opportunity to women and to be accountable to the society, long-term strategies that can challenge the existing structure are required. Women should have a voice in defining development and selecting policies.

When we discuss development certain important and decisive factors have to be taken into consideration: Fulfilling basic needs (not only right to health, education, housing, drinking water, but also the ways people themselves produce and sustain income and employment) and Restoration and Sustenance of environment.

For the development of tribesfolk, a new vision is essential: a vision to build an ecologically sound, non-exploitative, just, non-patriarchal, self-sustained society. This search for a new perspective has to be done while keeping the tribesfolk as the reference point for their development. This new vision/ could be called as subsistence perspective or the survival perspective. The most important aspect is the participation in the decision-making process. Without this there is no meaning of in discussion about development. In the decision making process there should be opportunity to participate fully. Individuals should get the opportunity to develop and use their talents and capacities

Development has to be based on the traditional tribal goals and values. The basis of this alternative development is the protection of life on a human and natural basis satisfying every one's physical, social, economical, and spiritual needs. Every individual's self worth and respect has to be protected. The basic values of this society would be honesty, peace, non-violence, equality, freedom, respect for work, eco-friendliness, and self-reliance.

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