



Case Study

Life, living and the struggles in Plakkathadam, a disconnected tribal colony in Idukki – a case study

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Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 21st March 2016, revised 12th January 2017, accepted 14th January 2017

Abstract

India is a country of villages and large number of tribal communities. Mahatma Gandhi dreamt about the self sufficiency of the villages through the concept of Gram Swaraj. But in India we see the growing tendency of urbanization alienating the real inhabitants of the country Hence it is worthwhile to have look at the situation of the Indian villages especially the tribal community their needs and requirements throwing up light and ways for their development.

Keywords: Ideology, Political ideology, Political System, Islam, Secularism, Afghanistan.

Introduction

India presently have a growing tendency of urbanization depriving the role of villages and local community in the mainstreams of the society and the nation. In such a framework it is definitely worthwhile to have look on the situation of the Indian villages their needs and requirements and more specifically on our tribal community those population who always get alienated being a part of our villages. Being a country with large number of tribal communities. Many of them live in very peculiar situations, usually remote, isolated and disconnected places. They are an under privileged sections of the society who need a special support from the Government and the society at large. Hence it will be interesting and useful to look at the peculiar situations in which they are living.

The tribal community in Kerala and in India is being categorized under the title 'Adivasis' meaning the aboriginal tribal people lived in India before the arrival of Aryans in the second millennium BC, who are the real inhabitants of the country but presently the extremely deprived community. "Education of ST (scheduled tribe) children is important not just due to constitutional obligation to equality for its citizen or special entitlements to ST, but because it is crucial input in nations strategy of total development of tribal." The paper focus on these community especially in Plakkathadam, an isolated tribal village in Idukki district of Kerala, India. A group of people confined themselves to low status isolating and isolated socially, politically and economically from the mainstream of the society.

The study focus on the Life, living and struggles of Plakkathadam tribal community, a disconnected tribal colony in Idukki – A case study based on primary data and survey report on the basis which the paper have been framed up. It is definite

that the paper will throw up light on this deprive community, help to seek the attention of administrators and policy makers to take appropriate steps for their upliftment.

Objectives: The general objective of the study was to have an understanding of the living situation of the people in the tribal colony of Plakkathadam. The specific objectives the study were the following: i. To build a clearer understanding of the life and living in the disconnected tribal colony of Plakkathadam, ii. To identify the major problems faced by the people in the locality, iii. To identify the possible solutions and interventions which will result in the improvement of the standard of living of the people in the locality.

Methodology

Our volunteers went and lived with the community for more than a week. They had a very close and intense interaction with the people. They visited all the houses, talked to everyone, ate together, worked together for the building of some community facilities, presented and enjoyed cultural programs together and through all those built a strong bonding with the people. As part of the whole exercise they collected the data for this study. Due to the bonding already built, the people were very much open and willing to share all that they could do. All the data forming part of this study is primary in nature and the back ground in which it was collected makes sure that it is correct and reliable.

The Theoretical frame work

Baiju K.C (2011) attempts to analyze the development and welfare programs addressing poverty, land alienation, exploitation, education, health care, employment and social development putting forward means and suggestions to strengthen the existing schemes and programs.

Dr. Mohammed P. Ajims and Dr. V. A. Haseena (2014) have done a similar study on Attappady tribal colony in Idukki district explaining the root causes of their alienation of tribal in education and the number of school dropouts.

Besides these studies, various newspaper articles and news regarding the deprived situation of the Plakkathadam tribal community have motivated in taking up this study and framing a report titled 'Mission Plakkathadam 2015' based on which the paper have been framed.

The Location

Peermade is a Taluk head quarters belonging to the Iduki district of Kerala state. Major part of the famous Thekkady wild life sanctuary is falling in the Peermade taluk and the famous Mullapperiyar Dam also is very close to this place (Only 20 miles away). Iduki district claims the largest tribal population in the state, it is industrially backward, and comprises of large areas of dense forests.

The Plakkathadam village which comprises of 113 families is only five kilometers away from the Taluk head quarters, which is surrounded by forests in all the four sides. It was in 1951 during the reign of the King Chithirathirunnal of Travancore that these families belonging to Malayaraya community were brought here. It was with the intention of cultivating Quaina plants which were used for the preparation of medicine for wild fever (Malaria). Another four families are living deep inside the forest who belongs to the Malapandara community. The notable thing is that even after 65 years of their living here there is no improvement in the basic infrastructure here. There are no facilities for pure drinking water, roads and the public distribution system also is inadequate.

The Anganwadi is functioning in the community hall. The public health center is opened and operated only once in a month. The children including the five year students studying in Kindergarten have to walk for more than eight kilometers a day, through hilly terrains to attend classes. If they have to reach school at 9.a.m. they have to start from their home at least by 7 a. m. In case of emergencies like accidents or severe diseases, due to the absence of motorable roads, people are to be carried to the hospitals which are available several kilometers away. Travelling through the paltry roads available here is always risky due to the chances of land slide. When heavy goods are to be brought to the hamlet for the construction of houses etc. they have no other means but of using donkeys etc.

The People

There are 113 families comprising of a total of 302 people living in this isolate village of which four families belonging to the Malampandara community lives deep inside the dense forest. All these people can be considered as farmers. Till now they have not received the Pattaya (Ownership document – Title

deeds). So they are not the owners of the land possessed by them. The document given by the government to them is the Vanavakasha rekha (Forest Rights Document). But this document cannot be used for arranging loans or selling the property. Though electric connection is available in all the houses except a few (Around 10), power cut is a very common phenomenon here. The repair work also is expected to be done by the local people.

Even though a village office is situated in the Taluk Head quarters which is situated five kilometers away, these people are asked to go to another office which is 30 kilometers away from this place. Even when they have to cut a tree from their own land they have to get permission from the forest department. When they tried to build stone walls to prevent the problem of wild elephants, there were opposition from the environmentalists. The only telephone service available in this locality is that of BSNL, but most often the services are not available.

The Profile of the People

Table-1 presents the profile of the population of this study. All the people in the Plakkathadam tribal hamlet belongs to Hindu community. There are 26 persons (8.6%) below the age of 12 years and 37 (12.25%) persons who are aged more than 60 years. The number of people in the 18-60 age category is 146 (48.34%).

According to Table-1.3 a significant portion of the Plakkathadam residents are illiterates i.e. 123 (40.73%). Those who are having high school level education are 99 (32.7%). There are six (1.9%) graduates, three post graduates (0.99%) and one professional (0.33%).

Table 1.4 shows the occupation wise distribution of the Plakkathadam population. The largest group happened to be the unemployed/Household category with 155 (51.3 %) which may be a very important reason for the economic backwardness of the region. For 82 (27.1%) the occupation is agriculture and 35 (11.5%) are students. Forty two (63.6%) households in Plakkathadam are having a land holding of more than 50 cents according to Table 1.5 but nine (13.6%) households are land less. Fifteen households (22.68%) hold land between 1-50 cents.

The situation

Table 2.1 to 2.5 presents the living situation of the people in the Plakkathadam village. Clean water is an important aspect which affects the living standards of the people. In the case of Plakkathadam, 22 (33.33 %) households depend on open wells for their water requirements and exactly the same number of people seems to have no specific sources for drinking water. Only seven (10.6%) households are having water connection and another 15 (22.7%) households depends on Public water supply system.

Out of the total population of 302 only 42 (13.9%) people became sick in the year 2014 during which the study was conducted. The most important ailment which affected the people are Fever (30 persons, 71.43%). The private medical facilities available for the people are costly and thus it is natural that Plakkathadam residents make use of the government health care facilities. The figures are 64 households and 97.01 per cent. Also the fact that the nearest town which is five kilometers away is a taluk head quarters and is having a taluk level hospital. The residents of Plakkathadam village are affected by certain other health issue which has got long term effects like diabetes, high or low blood pressure, Asthma, cancer etc. The largest group is Diabetes (29, 9.6%) patients followed by Heart patients (14, 4.64%) and the problem of high or low blood pressure (14, 4.64%). Hence it is clear that the Plakkathadam residents who live in the context of inadequate facilities also are prone to the 'life style' diseases.

The Plakkathadam residents though they are in possession of small areas of land for a long period of time, none of them have got Pattaya (the ownership documents) for it. Fifty five households (83.33%) are living in their houses in this area for

more than 30 years. What they have is the Vanavakasha Rekha (The Forest Rights Document). Thus they cannot sell the property or borrow money from financial institutions. This is a serious problem faced by the people of this locality.

Seventy four (24.5%) people are getting some sort of financial assistance from the Government. It is in the form of House Construction Grant (43, 14.2%), Widow Pension (11, 3.6%) and Old Age Pension (20, 6.6%). The major 'luxury' in the Plakkathadam region is Television sets. Forty six houses (69.7%) boast of having a television set. There are six refrigerators, one washing machine and one computer possessed by people of this area.

The type of roofing material used by the people is one indicator which can be used to assess the living standards of the people. Nineteen households (28.52%) are having houses with concrete roofs and 36 (54.54%) families live in houses with tin sheet roofing. The major source of fuel for household requirements in Plakkathadam is fire wood (53 houses, 80.3%). Only 12 families (18.18%) are having LPG connection.

Table-1: A profile of the people living in the Plakkathadam Tribal Village

1.1 Religious back Ground of the Population									
Religion		Hindu			%				
Hindu		302			100%				
1.2 Age Groups of the Population									
Age Group	0-5	6-12	13-17	18-35	30-60	Above 60	Total		
No.	13	13	13	56	90	37	302		
Per cent	4.3	4.3	4.3	18.54	29.8	12.25	100		
1.3 Educational Status of the Population									
Educational Status	Up To UP	HS	+2	Degree	Post Graduates	Technical	Professional	Non Formal	Illiterate
	35	99	17	6	3	4	1	14	123
Per Cent	11.5	32.7	5.6	1.9	0.99	1.32	0.33	4.6	40.73
1.4 Occupation wise distribution of the Population									
Category	Agriculture	Office	Tech nical	Professional	Driver	Students	Unemployed/House hold	Gov. Staff	Others
Number	82	2	3	2	5	35	155	9	9
Per Cent	27.1	0.66	0.99	0.66	1.6	11.5	51.3	2.93	2.93
1.5 Distribution of households according to size of land (cents) owned									
Size of land	1-5	6-10	11-25	26-50	Above 50	Landless	Total		
Number	12	1	0	2	42	9	66		
Per Cent	18.18	1.5	0	3.0	63.6	13.6	100		

Table-2: Table presenting the living situation of the inhabitants of the Plakkathadam Tribal Village

2.1 Sources of Drinking Water										
	Open Well	Water Connection	Public Water Supply	Others	Total					
Number of Households	22	7	15	22	66					
Per Cent	33.33	10.6	22.7	33.33	100					
2.2 Sickness and Plakkathadam Inhabitants in 2014										
Total Sick People in 2014			42							
Per cent			13.9							
Total Population			302							
2.3 Diseases which affected the Plakkathadan Inhabitants in 2014										
Diseases	Fever	Dengue Fever	Chicken Guinea	Typhoid	Others	Total				
Number	30	1	5	1	5	42				
Per cent	71.43	2.38	11.90	2.38	11.90	100				
2.4 Distribution of households by types of health facility availed										
Facility	Government		Private		Total					
Number	64		2		66					
Per cent	97.01		2.98		100					
2.5 Classification of the respondents according to diseases which last for long term periods										
Diseases	Diabetes	Blood Pressure	Heart Diseases	Asthma	Epilepsy	TB	Cancer	Stroke	Others	None
Number	29	14	14	9	1	1	2	1	20	211
Per cent	9.60	4.64	4.64	2.98	0.33	0.33	0.66	0.33	6.62	69.87

Suggestions for improving the situation

One very important thing which will bring very significant changes in the lives of people at Plakkathadam is the construction of suitable roads. The taluk head quarters Peermade is only five kilometers away. Most of the government offices and facilities like schools (including more than one higher secondary school) and hospitals are available there. There are four colleges situated within 10 kilometers distance from Plakkathadam. The population here is unable to make use of all these facilities just because of the unavailability of access. National Highway NH 193 is passing through the taluk headquarters. Thus it is clear that it is not the distance of

Plakkathadam from developed centers but the inadequate access is the problem. All the significant problems faced by the people like lack of access to educational facilities for children, inadequate prices for the agricultural produce and the difficulties faced by the people in bringing house construction materials from the towns etc. can be solved by the construction of suitable roads.

Most of the Plakkathadam residents are in possession of cultivable land but they are not the owners of it. They cannot sell or transfer the property or pledge it for the purpose of taking loans etc. Thus instead of providing with Forest Rights Document, ownership rights on the property should be given to the people.

Table-3: Life situation of the residents of Plakkathdam Tribal Hamlet

3.1 Distribution of houses holds on the basis of Pattaya (Title Documents) Received						
Ownership Document		Pattaya Received			Pattaya Not Received	
Number		0			66	
Per Cent		0			100	
3.2 Financial assistance from Government and Plakkathdam Residents						
	Widow Pension	Old Age Pension	House Construction Grant	Total		
Number	11	20	43	74		
Per cent	3.6	6.6	14.2	24.5		
3.3 Period of Stay in the houses occupied by the Plakkathadam residents						
Years of Occupation		0-10	11-30	31-50	Above 50	
Number		4	7	26	29	
Per cent		6	10.6	39.39	43.94	
3.4 Modern Household equipments and Plakkathdam residents						
Equipments	Television	Refrigerator	Washing Machine	Computer	None	Total
Number	46	6	1	1	12	66
Percent	69.7	9.09	1.51	1.51	18.18	100
3.5 Classification of Houses based on roof category						
Roof Category	Concrete	Hut -Coconut leaves	Sheet	Thatched Roof		
Number	19	1	36	10		
Per Cent	28.52	1.51	54.54	16.15		
3.6 Category of fuel used by the Plakkathadam residents						
Category	LPG	Firewood	Electric Stove			
Number	12	53	1			
Per cent	18.18	80.30	1.51			

The setting up of an outlet of the rather efficient and effective Public Distribution System of the state will help in solving the issue of hunger in the village. There are certain houses in which only aged people without any specific source of income are living. Very often they are without any help or support and starving.

There are facilities built for the distribution of clean water but not functioning effectively due to the absence of personnel and resources for the effective maintaining. This along with improving the services of the health workers may contribute significantly in improving the health standards of the people.

Another area of intervention needed is from the side of the forest officials. There are walls constructed to prevent the entry

of wild elephants in to the village, but it is damaged in many places. As per the existing rules, even when some big trees threaten the life and property of the inhabitants, it cannot be cut or removed. They will be charged with the blame of damaging the forest and have to face legal procedures. This is affecting the peaceful living of the people in the area. Hence appropriate changes in the law and lenient approaches by the forest officials are necessary for the contented living of the people here.

Few people who belongs to the Malampanara community are living a very primitive life style. They live in the remote forest and is no contact with the outside world. They marry from their family itself (sometimes even their own daughters). It is said that when they find it difficult to look after their children, they will come out of the thick forest abandon them in Plakkathadam. Some steps for rehabilitating these people has become the need of the hour.

Conclusion

The volunteers who had participated in the exercise of visiting, working and living with the people in the Plakkathadam tribal hamlet had a very deep, tremendously disturbing and unsettling learning experience. They had a real life experience of the life and living of the people in the remote villages of the country. They realized the need of the educated to be more sensitive to the needs of the less privileged people in the society. They

became more aware about the need that the policy makers and administrators to be more sensitive to the needs of the poor people in the society.

The openness and friendliness of the people of the Plakkathadam village was heartening. The living standards of the people in this locality may be far behind what is available in developed places but considering the human values and the sensitivity they expressed to their visitors, there is no doubt, they are far ahead of their contemporaries elsewhere.

We sincerely believe that this study conducted at Plakkathadam and the suggestions incorporated will help in improving the plight of the people by inviting the attention of the administrators and policy makers.

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