

‘Tribal Development’ -Perspective from Below

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Abstract

Development of Scheduled Tribes has always been a matter of concern, extensive discourse and actions for a long period in India. Starting from the colonial period, initiatives made by various bodies, governments as well as others had invariably brought changes in the life of the tribal people in India, and Kerala also has a similar historical trajectory. Though conditions are improving, there is a persisting degenerative condition lived by the people and also there is a marked disparity in the extent of improvements. Grounding on two governmental key reports, one at the national level (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India -2014) and one at the state level (Scheduled Tribes Development Department, Govt. of Kerala -2013), a contextual and thematic analysis of the socio-cultural, economic and infrastructural aspects is made based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a group of settlements in Idukki district, Kerala. The study reveals that there exists a scenario where the development reaches the ground differentially and reception by the beneficiaries also exhibits a continuum of aspirations, expectations, and realities. It also illustrates that for an effective realization of development initiatives certain cultural specificities and social dynamics at the basic level need to be emphasized.

Keywords: Scheduled Tribes, Xaxa Committee Report, Development, Modernity, Kerala.

Introduction

The development of tribal people has always been a persistent concern for the government and administrators from the early days. The approach taken by the governments, from the colonial period till the present-day native rule, had a broad spectrum of outlooks, not only in terms of the conceptual ideas on the tribes and their identities but about the treatment of this minority group in a larger context of a nation and its population. Parallel to this, the academic discourses on this

particular section of the people have also been contained with multitudes of approaches and perspectives, from identity and naming to the planning of interventions. Popular conception during the British colonial period connects even further way back in history, to the pre-colonial times with a completely different socio-political context. The names like *jana*, *vanjati*, *adimjati*, etc., are remnants of the past that persisted from the precolonial times to the present day. What is interesting about the nomenclature is the process and approaches (even with traceable ideologies persisted) in demonstrating the identity of a section of the people in the society, essentially in a marginalizing manner (Beteille, 1986; Xaxa, 1999).

The nomenclature also extends to the process of official identification of certain groups as Scheduled Tribes, for administrative requirements. This is needed for the governments to treat particular people with specific special considerations, especially in the post-independence period, in the extensive attempts to bring this group of people to the forefront of the 'developed' mainstream general population. Overcoming the historic injustices done over the people was a major aim associated with this, which is essentially the core part of the protective discrimination adopted in the constitution, as the constitutional safeguards. All these series of matters, from the identification, nomenclature, and special treatment through various acts, policies, and programs are in a way connected (or should be connected) in a synchronous manner to form a continuum that essentially leads to the betterment of the life of the once marginalized and sidelined section of the people.

In the whole process aimed at this objective, various ideas were considered in a manner of fundamental principles. These were on how to treat them, or how to handle them in the efforts to bring their life to a better form, mostly in comparison with the general population and perceptions. Approaches of assimilation, isolation, and integration were the three different types of methods adopted by the state at various points in time, each of them influenced by the ideologies with the major supporters and promoters associated. The assimilation approach came in the first half of the twentieth century with the support of such people as sociologists like G. S. Ghurye (1963), by which the tribal people were considered as none different from the general population, but simply a part of them. The underlying element in this consideration and approach was that the tribes are also a part of the Hindu population, in a way, in support of the interests of Hindu religious followers, or more specifically, promoters of Hindutva politics. This type of categorization was made possible with pieces of evidence like the nature of the religious practices of tribes, which were indigenous folk religions of animistic type, which was easily compared

with that of Hinduism, which had broad fluid, and all-encompassing principles and practices (Srivastava, 2008). The problem with such an approach, taking only certain cultural aspects is that it closes any possibilities of overcoming the unfavorable social and economic conditions of the people.

The second approach, mostly propagated with such people as Verrier Elwin in his earlier days was some sort of an isolationist approach. The idea behind this was considering the tribal people as a very distinct group of people with peculiar culture and social systems, including economic and political, which are self-reliant and satisfactory for them. Under this, no special consideration was required for the tribal people and any attempt to ‘bring them on par with the general population’ is unnecessary and absurd, and holds a belief that such interventions will essentially destroy their life and culture. That is, no interference, regardless of good or bad, is required to deal with the people and should be allowed to live (or perish) on their own. The third approach of integration was the one that received the highest support from the post-independence governments, particularly from the then prime minister Mr. Nehru himself. The main principles of this approach were presented in the introduction Nehru wrote for the book of Verrier Elwin (1964), *A Philosophy for NEFA*. This consisted of five key points, later popularly known by Nehruvian Panchasheel for tribal development which has its core theme in improving the condition of the tribal people on their own genius to the best conditions existing in the country as a whole.

Fast forwarding to the twenty-first century, the majority of the tribal people are still remaining in a very bad situation regardless of many plans, policies, and programs developed and implemented by the government as well as many civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations. There were also many committees appointed by the government to study, understand and prepare guidelines to improve the condition of the Scheduled Tribes.

Two reports on the social condition

It was in 2014 that the Prime Minister’s Office constituted a High-Level Committee (HLC) under the chairmanship of the eminent scholar on tribal studies Prof. Virginius Xaxa to assess the condition of the Scheduled Tribe communities in the country. The mandate of the committee was “to examine the socio-economic, educational and health status of tribal communities and recommend appropriate intervention measures to improve the same” (Xaxa et al., 2014: 21). Based on the inputs from various government organizations (like National Sample Survey

Organisation -NSSO), Non-Governmental Organizations, academics, community organizations, and direct visits to many tribal areas, the Committee crafted the report. It tried to cover every part of the country also by incorporating specific special cases, like the land struggle in Kerala and Leftwing extremism in the central Indian region. The major themes are developed into specific chapters where detailed analyses are made and recommendations are directed at the end of each chapter. There is also a detailed special section in the report that dealt with these recommendations towards the end of it.

By realizing the still persisting problems and concerns related to the life of the tribal people (in their interaction with the state) on such matters as “disregard for their values and culture, breach of protective legislation, serious material and social deprivation, and aggressive resource alienation”, the HLC made a seven-point reference perspective in their study. Comprehensively these points are, empowerment of citizenry and especially a self-governance, socio-economic progress in terms of habitations, facilities like health, education, livelihood, drinking water, sanitation, roads, electricity, and sustainable income, protection of traditional land holding, forest rights, and allied livelihood systems, right to natural resources, protection from land alienation related to natural resource extraction and community benefits, right over a share of the wealth generated from resources in their homelands, and finally, a right to preserve their language, culture, and tradition and thereby protecting their identity and so on (Xaxa et al., 2014: 32-33). Based on the detailed study which was possible due to the vast expertise and experience the committee members possess regardless of the time and other resource constraints the HLC submitted the report in the same year with extensive and realistic recommendations. These recommendations are very significant and ideal, especially with the feature that they are derived from ground-level reality looking towards a realistic betterment of conditions of the tribal people, in a most suitable and docile manner, by some of the best available experts in the field.

The Scheduled Tribes Development Department (STDD) is the apex governmental administrative body in the state of Kerala that deals with the tribal people in the state. In 2013 STDD prepared a detailed report on the socio-economic status of scheduled Tribes of Kerala. This report is prepared in the form of a situation analysis, in an attempt to understand the overall socio-economic condition of all the tribal people in the state. The report consists of thirteen chapters including an introduction, findings and observation, and recommendation chapters. Thematically each of the core chapters dealt with such aspects as demographic features, habitation,

education, livelihood pattern, health, basic amenities, land and land development, forest interface, social security and development, and gender status. Each of these major themes was divided into several sub-themes and in this way, this report covered almost every significant matter of concern for a government from a developmental point of view. What is contrasting in this report is that it is almost entirely based on technical data with minimal ethnographic inputs from the ground-level situation and realities, though the ground-level experience and expertise of the officials who prepared it contribute positively. Extensive statistical data, especially given as annexures is another specialty of this report based on which one can understand the situation of the tribal people based on quantitative parameters. A clear and comprehensive picture of the whole report is outlined in the findings and observations chapter, where thematically point-by-point qualitative observations are made.

The Kerala tribal context

The state of Kerala has a small but significant population of tribal communities which is also unique in its diversity. The tribal people are identified by the state and the general population in varying ways, both positively as well as negatively. The peculiar status of the tribal people in the society has historical roots and is also related to the socio-cultural characteristics. The relationship between the general population and the tribal communities is always in a sensitive manner, with prejudices, and frequently in a marginalizing fashion. The tribal people as a community and as a part of the larger society are undergoing changes which are observed to be looking towards the future. While comparing various developmental parameters and socio-economic indices, it is found to be obvious that the tribal people in the state are lagging behind the general population with a huge gap, from many of the top-level ranks the state possesses at the national level. There are many studies with a focus on specific as well as general tribal contexts in Kerala that touches various indices and have elaborated on various factors leading to it (Raman, 2004; Kunhaman, 1985). Broadly, these parameters are taken in terms of economic, political participation, education, health, family welfare, and so on.

The present essay is prepared based on the inputs from ethnographic fieldwork carried out among two tribal communities in the Idukki district and is an attempt to reflex on the matters elaborated in the above-discussed two reports on the general socio-economic development of the Scheduled Tribes. In this process, the findings, observations, and recommendations of these two reports are taken as the basic point

of reference while observing the case with reference to Muthuvan and Hill Pulaya people in the district (Iyer, 1912; Luiz, 1962; Thomas, 2016). The method of data collection consisted of direct fieldwork by being with the people in their hamlets and other places of their daily activities, following methods of both participant observation and non-participant observation. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner based on a thematically prepared checklist with broad as well as specific questions. The sample consisted of individuals classified into three sets, roughly based on generations. In-depth interviews formed the main data collection method and were mostly carried out by walking with the informants in their habitat, simultaneously probing into detailed nuances of their daily life. The themes of inquiry tried to cover all the key themes delineated in the above-mentioned two reports and in addition to that, a special focus was given to those aspects related to the cultural ecology of the people, indigenous knowledge, and traditional livelihood systems, to mention a few. A significant and unique theme considered in the whole fieldwork times is the conscious attempts made by the researcher to understand the perspectives of the people towards the overall living conditions, their needs and requirements of various facilities enjoyed by the general population, and also the aspirations of the young generation with a particular emphasis. The objective behind this approach is to understand the worldview of the people in the olden days and the present and also to learn how it is changing over time. Based on such an approach the research tried to elucidate what the condition of the people is and what they aspire to in their future.

The studies on the social conditions of Scheduled Tribes adopt different methods and emphasis based on the nature of the objectives and the bodies that conduct the research. Governmental bodies will be adopting a certain way that may be different from that of a non-governmental organization, and both these two may be different from the methods adopted by academic researchers. Whatever may be the methods and outcomes of such studies many a time the reports fail to address certain crucial elements embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of the tribal people. This could be due to the lack of consideration of certain peculiar features of the tribal people themselves or difficulties in elucidating such elements with conventional methods and approaches. This may be in terms of theoretical models or methodological perspectives and devices generally adopted in such studies. To overcome such problems, this research is developed by acknowledging the methodologies of the indigenous research methods and theoretically, it emphasizes cultural ecology and acculturation, and innovations in social change.

Taken from a larger project on understanding the cultural ecology and indigenous knowledge of the tribal people with regard to the survival of the people, this work looks into the nuances of how different generations are observing the changing lifeways as well as changes happening among themselves. The original project is intended to cover eight different tribal communities in the Idukki district and here, the focus is given to the Muthuvans and Hill Pulaya. The ethnographic fieldwork reveals that the tribal people want to enjoy the facilities available in the contemporary world, in terms of decent living conditions, access to novelties, development, and soon. Simultaneously, the people also want to have many of their unique cultural characteristics and assets preserved and continued. Analysis across material amenities, livelihood, education, health, and access to modern facilities explains the aspirations and prospectus of the people.

Social change is perceived as the changes happening to various social organizations and institutions, it involves understanding the changes in the life and culture of the people across time. The tribal people's life and culture are undergoing changes in a multitude of aspects and levels. This is visible in those aspects from habitat structure, settlement pattern, and structure of buildings, various material amenities. Apart from these, the educational, health, and employment aspects are also looked upon. Among various social organizations and institutions in these communities, the economic system is observed to be the central one with the highest impact on their daily life, and associated with this there are many other changes too. The contact with the non-tribal society through various modes has also brought significant changes in the life of the people (Ramaswami and Bhukya 2002, Bukhya 2008). The changes happening to the life and culture of the people are observed broadly in the following themes, material culture, economy, political system, and social conduct, and finally, aspirations and ambitions of the people, especially that of the young generation. Large-scale interventions of the state through its various functionaries also contribute to the changes happening among the people.

Livelihood and Agriculture

Muthuvan is the people who practiced shifting cultivation as their primary subsistence activity living in northern parts of the Idukki district, with a small population living in the neighboring district of Ernakulam. Though agriculture was the main economic activity, they also found subsistence in foraging and collection of both edible and marketable produce from the forest. In the olden days, they relied almost entirely on the forest and cultivable land available to them to sustain an

almost self-sufficient life. The Hill Pulayas, which actually consist of two distinct tribal communities, Kurumba Pulaya, and Karavazhi Pulaya, had slightly different socio-economic life when compared to Muthuvan. Kurumba Pulaya (locally referred to mostly as simply Kurumba) practiced agriculture like that of Muthuvan but not as extensively as the latter, added with other subsistence modes based on foraging. Karavazhi Pulaya on the other hand have had no consistent agricultural practice whereas they majorly relied on foraging and subsisting on forest produces. Wage labor in the fields of neighboring agriculturalist caste communities is also a source of income for the latter. Animal husbandry used to be an activity of Hill Pulayas in general, especially the herding of goats. Each of the different types of economic systems has a certain kind of influence on the general social life of each of the respective communities. It is not wrong to find the remnants of the ways of life of each of these communities from the past to the present day. The settled Muthuvans have been adopted to the present market-oriented agriculture regardless of changes in crop selection and confusion and inconsistency shown by Hill Pulayas, especially the Karavazhi Pulaya.

Based on the varying conditions there happens changes in livelihood and subsistence strategies and mechanisms. With the stringent laws aimed at the preservation and protection of forests and wildlife, the state strictly regulates the material collection from the traditional source of forest (and wildlife too) and this has terminated a subsistence-type economy, that relied on forest resources, among the tribes. The options of the forest as a means of livelihood have minimized to limited land for agriculture that too not in the extensive slash and burn type they practiced traditionally, which actually required access to vast areas of forest land. With the increased contact with outsiders, especially the merchants, the collection and sale of Non-timber Forest Produce fetched 'money' to the hands of the tribes. Lemongrass cultivation and the extraction of oil aimed at outside markets also became a source of income for the people. The collection of edible tubers which once formed a major part of their diet minimized to rarity.

There are reasons from multiple sides that drive and facilitate the overall changes happening in the tribal communities. Looking at the economic system once again, now with regard to food production, the discontinuation of the cultivation of food grain, finger millet (*ragi*) primarily, maize, foxtail millet (*thinai*), and kodo millet (*varagu*), etc. can itself attributed to multiple reasons. Attack of wild animals on the field that results in minimal or no return from the hard and extended labor is a prime reason. Young men are these days not ready to spend an entire duration of

cultivation, up to six months in watch-huts to guard their crop against an animal attack and crop raids by elephants, wild buffalos, wild boar, etc., which actually increased manifold compared to the olden days and animals also became fearless of humans, according to informants.

The pattern of diet also has undergone substantial change. The millets are not a regular part of their diet these days. Eating in different forms, the *katti* (powdered finger millet cooked in dough form) mainly is not an appetizing one for many, particularly among the young generations. It could be eaten occasionally by the middle generation, and rarely by the youngest generation, again better if supplementing curries are available, meat specifically. In the olden days, the availability of resources for subsistence was mainly decided by nature and also met with the cultivation of food grains. As there were no other resources or means to procure essential consumables and neither the state supplied any, if there is no resource, they minimize their consumption or go hungry.

The general pattern of two-time meals, in the morning and evening, might be derived from the non-availability of food, not a system based on the culture of the community, except practical reasons for having a meal while at work in the forest, except fruits and tubers gathered while being in the forest eaten as snacks. No culture will make intentional regular avoidance of food (not religious fasting). This is evident from the present scenario in which the people take meals three times a day regularly, including their mid-day meal during work. The acculturation element here is the culture/ practice learned by the new generation who lived outside the tribal setting, for schooling mainly, are accustomed to three (or four times a day) meals. When they come back to their own place they require three meals and cannot live with only two meals. Some of the people, who are in their fifties and sixties, do continue the old style of not having a mid-day meal, drinking unsweetened black tea.

According to an informant, specifically, money is the single factor with the highest impact that brought changes in many aspects of the life of the tribal people. Among the tribes, the first acquaintance with money was through the trade of minor forest products in the market. This money inflow took the correct shape with the commencement of lemongrass oil production, among both Hill Pulayas as well as Muthvans, but chiefly among the latter. Among Hill Pulaya, the trade of livestock, especially goats brought money. The people started the cultivation of lemongrass and production of oil by themselves or participated in this business at least as cultivators of grass or as helpers in distilleries. They also started to earn money from wage labor, in agriculture fields, or other such non-skilled work. The forest

department also offered labor, associated with various works in the forest, especially the maintenance of vegetation, etc.

The income in the form of cash from various channels and through different labor activities and the sale of different products enabled them to 'buy' things from the market, particularly food provisions. This in turn influenced the crop pattern and a shift to cash crops furthered, which again increased their dependency on the market for food, and the system perpetuated with higher intensity. Interestingly, at the same time, there are also different views and opinions about the essential livelihood practices the tribes need to sustain,

The *panakrishi* (cultivation of cash crops) is okay, but at least half of the area of land or land that is sufficient to produce enough food crop should be kept available and cultivation must continue, in the future too. The complete dependency on the market, even for food grain is not good for the future of the people -explains Bhuvanachandran, a Muthuvan farmer from Iruttalakudi hamlet.

Education, Health, and Family

These three aspects are very key in the whole discourse on the development of any community. The tribal communities have always been experiencing a negative relationship with the education system of the general modern type. The lower level of participation in the education system and the frequent cases of failure to attain a desired level of education is still continuing, though a very small section of the tribal people, a select group of them showing a promising result. The commonly understood problems range from a schooling system and practice that is totally alien to the tribal culture, language barriers, and difficult access to schools mainly stemming from the isolated location of settlements, availability of hostel facilities, and financial capabilities. Additionally, cultural incompatibilities also play a crucial role in adjusting to the unfamiliar condition. To overcome many of these hindrances, governments have developed systemic schemes for the best outcomes, but still, an alarmingly large number of youngsters fail to achieve education, especially at the higher education level. In most of the higher education institutions, the seats reserved for Scheduled Tribe candidates remain unfilled every year. In many a case, students discontinue their education after a short period. The dropout phenomenon is an extensively dealt theme in many studies which finds several reasons explained by the tribal people themselves, many, same as the above mentioned. However, a detailed conversation with the people in their own places reveals realities at another level. Till the level of Plus Two, students do not face many problems generally, because the facilities like Model Residential Schools principally aimed at the

education of tribal children and other schools with hostel facilities provide a satisfactory environment for the children. The parents of children at this level of schooling also face less financial burden and are satisfied with the education matters. But any attempt for higher education after higher secondary level always comes with many hurdles and difficulties, financial, hostel facilities, many subject and discipline options which are less anticipated, distance, and so on.

Xaxa report recommends that the purpose of education “should be to provide children with an understanding of the environment and society in which they live and to endow them with the capability to earn a livelihood in the local society and, for those who have the desire and ability, in the national job market” (Xaxa et al., 2014: 395). This could apparently be a crucial point in the whole philosophy regarding education. However, what happens in reality, is the incompatibilities of the whole general education system and its culture with that of the tribal people largely prevent them from effectively pursuing education. Even when a student completes his or her schooling, the majority of them come back to their native places and find a living in whatever manner the other fellow community members are pursuing. The comments made by many of the informants confirm this, regarding the confusing situation faced by the educated youth, as they fail to make any promising career out of their education and are being forced to continue with a conventional life. There was also a serious problem from the side of parents, many of them not favoring the schooling of their children, forcing them to take up wage labor to earn money, simply to satisfy their daily needs including their spending on alcoholic liquor. The case of females invariably has their gender-based paths, the family and relatives forcing them to abandon studies after higher secondary education (at the best) to get married and live as a homemaker, by taking care of their family, husband, and children. An informant explained to the ethnographer the struggle he made to educate his girl children fighting against the continued opposition from his relatives and neighbors. The problems related to the economic capabilities in sending their children after higher secondary level, difficulties in getting suitable accommodation, problems related to the medium of education at degree and higher levels, insecurities and alienation faced even in a classroom all matter the whole education of tribal people.

To discuss another important impact related to the schooling of the young generation in distant locations, it was a commonly mentioned fact by the tribal people that the school-going children and youth are losing close essential contact with their community and its culture. The traditional community life practiced by

the tribal people was very significant in the growing up of children, especially it was through the community life they learned essential skills needed for life in adulthood. The kids by the age of ten or so used to join their livelihood activities (like the cultivation in slash and burn fields, foraging, etc.) and the close-knit nature of the community living in hamlets was the chief enculturation mechanism among them. Apart from the crucial skills related to livelihood and subsistence, they also learned various cultural aspects like dances, songs, folklore, crafts, etc., and also the learning of social norms, customs, manners, etc. Since the adolescent period is spent at schools in distant places with minimal occasional contact with their own culture in their hamlets (only during vacations) they fail to learn their own culture. The negative effect of this, according to informants, is that many youngsters are falling into a very confused and critical state where they have no expertise and skill required to make a good living either in their traditional setting or in the modern outside setting.

If the above-mentioned aspects are the most probable reasons for the poor education status and failure in employment, there need to be certain technical and conceptual reorientations adopted to make the situation better. Infrastructure development is technically not a difficult task except for money, but finding the right path is a crucial matter. To make sure satisfactory cultural compatibility, educational institutions need to be established in places that the tribal people predominantly inhabit and should have a good 'cultural environment' in the institution and in its activities so that the student does not get alienated by the system. At the same time, it is also important to develop courses that are compatible with the abilities, expertise, capabilities, and aspirations of the tribal people, acknowledged by their traditional wisdom and skills. Vocational training can act as a suitable main or major aspect of courses specifically designed for them. Specializations like livestock studies, agriculture, forest resource management and business, biodiversity conservation, etc. by relating to the traditional livelihood systems of pastoralism, sedentary as well as shifting cultivation, foraging, etc. could be effectively synchronized to develop and new economic system suitable with the current world. At the same time, there is a good part of the tribal youth who wants to embrace, experience, and progress through the present system and this also should be facilitated with an effective mechanism as they are facing serious problems from that system. A very efficient supportive mechanism, in terms of economic, social security, cultural, and behavioral matters needs to be created by incorporating government departments, educational institutions, student organizations, and cultural organizations, and the network should connect the native places and community (hamlets generally) of the students

with the education institutions. If such a network is not existing and all stakeholders and responsible people join together in supporting a student, there is a great chance for the student to get dropped out of the system.

Just like the extensive supportive programs and facilities the state offers to the tribal people for education, in the health and family welfare sector too, there is a sophisticated system and mechanism to support them, free of cost, with the most comfort for the people. However, the participation of the people in the healthcare system by using the facilities as it is meant to be and also by complying with the general and specific guidelines related to various health, hygiene, and other safety measures is not as satisfactory as it envisages. So, this matter requires particular consideration while analyzing and assessing the overall health and welfare condition of the tribal people. This can be explained with the help of a few cases observed in the field.

Snakebite is not uncommon in many of the tribal areas as the people live close to the forest and engage with various types of environments, but human casualties have reduced drastically when compared to the olden days. However occasional human casualties or serious health problems are observed among the tribal people. Not taking the proper, best available health service is one reason for such incidents. Occasionally transportation creates difficulties in connecting with the hospitals but apart from that, confusing decisions made by the people with regard to consultation of the best facility, finding solutions at the traditional healers, etc. often create mishaps.

The care of pregnant women, young mothers, and infants is a sensitive matter in this regard. Regardless of the ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers and Anganwadi employees who try their best to provide required services, the beneficiaries often decline or avoid such important services, which leads to the bad health condition of young mothers as well as infants. Food supplements, folic acid supplements, and other such services are occasionally not taken into the right consideration by the people. In infant care also, people are found to be not following the best advisable methods. Many such cases can be found in healthcare-related matters and the bottom line in all this is the proper awareness creation and enabling them to practice the culture as envisioned by the system. Making use of the advisable and best hospital facility is also a matter of general concern. All the services to the tribal people are provided free of cost in a government hospital and whenever they require the service from the private hospitals, the tribal department bears the expenses. Though this is the case, for many medical cases the people incur from

spending their own money. One informant reported to the ethnographer that he spends about twenty-five thousand rupees for the delivery of his wife, as he had to take the service at a private hospital. This kind of expenditure is very common when they seek service at hospitals in their nearest accessible town of Udumalpettai, which is in Tamil Nadu state. The state government department does not have the option to bear the hospital expenses when service is sought in a different state. The base problem here is that the Marayoor and Kanthalloor region is quite isolated from the main towns in Kerala like Adimali where government hospitals with better facilities are available, but the travel to this place through the rugged hills and winding roads is a nightmare they want to avoid even during occasions other than medical emergencies. To address many of the problems discussed above, ground-level assistance is required, which should start at the school level and extend to the hamlet level and individual family level. Though the ASHA workers are reaching the families to address individual cases, unless and until proper awareness is created among the beneficiaries, no intensive grassroots-level initiative will meet the aims.

Socio-cultural differences and their reflections

There is a clear difference observable between the two communities of Muthuvan and Hill Pulaya, though inhabiting the same setting and ecosystem (the complex of living organisms, their physical environment, and all their interrelationships in a particular unit of space) and habitat (place where an organism or a community of organisms lives, including all living and nonliving factors or conditions of the surrounding environment), but have different niche (all of the interactions of a species with the other members of its community), which are also culturally differentiated.

Muthuvan community possesses a considerable area of land and are active in agriculture activities, earlier food crops, but slowly shifted to cash crops that began with lemon grass cultivation and oil making, and later to other crops like cardamom, coffee, black pepper, and market aimed cultivation of vegetables like butter beans, Chinese potatoes, plantain and so on. That is, their traditional livelihood mechanism of agricultural activities is still continuing though the crops are changing. With this, they derive a considerable part of their livelihood and build a mindset that the money makes them capable of buying whatever provisions they require to live. On the other hand, Hill Pulayas traditionally less relied on agriculture and had a more subsistence-type livelihood system, much relying on produce directly available from the forest. This was supported by income from daily wage labour too and in a way one can

observe that they do not have a very specialized economic system. Forest produce, both as food as well as cash-generating formed the major part of their economic system.

In the present context, the forest department is playing a substantial role in the life of the tribal people. Various laws and policies aimed at the protection, preservation, and conservation of forests, wildlife, and various resources in the region have considerably affected the traditional livelihood systems of the people. The regulation on land use has restricted the slash-and-burn type of agriculture, and the wildlife protection act has restricted them from hunting. Now, they have the possibility of using specific areas of land which are under their control and making use of it in a satisfactory manner. The restriction on hunting is of no serious impact on their diet and requirement for animal protein as they have sufficient economic capabilities to meet it by purchasing meat from the market, mostly. Also, there is no prevention in collecting minor forest produce, except the permission required from the forest department, which is easily granted. At the same time, people are getting employment in the forest department, both temporary as well as permanent, and this has provided them with a better economic condition and social life. That is, in certain ways the tribal people have an environment and options to sustain a decent living or means to develop further. This is possible when the economic system of the tribal people is integrated with that of the outside market in an effective manner, by overcoming the factor of exploitation.

Affluence, Aspiration and Acculturation

Acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological changes that involve various forms of mutual accommodation, leading to some longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between both groups. Acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At the group level, it involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices. At the individual level, it involves changes in a person's behavioral repertoire. These cultural and psychological changes come about through a long-term process, sometimes taking years, sometimes generations, and sometimes centuries. Four acculturation strategies have been derived from two basic issues facing all acculturating people. These two issues are based on the distinction between orientations toward one's own group and those toward other groups (Berry, 2005). These issues involve the distinction between (1) a relative preference for maintaining one's heritage culture

and identity, and (2) a relative preference for having contact with and participating in the larger society along with other ethnocultural groups. Many of the actual processes of sociocultural changes happening in the life of the tribal people can be observed with this theoretical model.

Changes that happened to the life of the people, their economic systems, and culture, are mostly guided by their surrounding cultures and their changes, that of the non-tribal population. This process is also facilitated by the state in various manners. There are also internal reasons, but those will still be in one way or another created or facilitated by external factors. The bottom line in the changes is, the tribal people want to preserve and continue whatever cultural practices they had, and these are in terms of dances, songs, etc., and not much about the material culture. In actuality, changes have happened to almost every aspect of their socio-cultural life to varying extents (whether they accept it or not.) A prime internal matter that they are concerned about is their traditional political system with *Kani* as their head, who manages the life and conduct of people in a hamlet. To elaborate on this, among the Muthuvan community especially, the bachelor houses, *chavadi* or *chatram* acted as the school where youngsters were taught various skills, conduct, and styles of their own by their elders and propagated their customs and culture. In the contemporary days, such bachelor houses are vanishing from the hamlets and because of this, the people are essentially losing a learning institution of their own culture (see for example Fürer-Haimendorf, 1950; Sathyanarayanan, 2013). If such traditional and culturally bound institutions can be effectively revived they could act as the best social institutions to connect with the modern education systems. It can also serve the purpose of becoming a self-help group of units to develop into livelihood activities and income generation.

It is at this time we need to take a look into the principles narrated by Nehru. At the core of his suggestions is the idea that the development of the tribes should be done 'along the lines of their own genius' and no paternalistic acts by outsiders, including government machinery should not be worked in a highly directive manner. This also continues with the recognition of their own cultural peculiarities. A significant matter along this line is the consideration of the worldview and ethos of the tribal people themselves, which is mostly different from that of the general population. The whole idea of life and 'development' could have a different perspective for the tribal people. Marshall Sahlins has discussed something in this line in his essay 'The Original Affluent Society'. He narrates,

By the common understanding, an affluent society is one in which all the people's material wants are easily satisfied... For there are two possible courses to affluence. Wants may be "easily satisfied" either by producing much or desiring little. The familiar conception, the Galbraithian way, makes assumptions peculiarly appropriate to market economies: that man's wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited, although improvable... (Sahlins, 2017: 1-2).

Understanding affluence materially may be possible but assessing it is difficult. Regarding the tribal people considered in this discussion, they are of the general opinion that the olden days were better in terms of mental satisfaction, regardless of scarcity and poverty. This is explained mostly by elderly people, who have experienced times when they had little contact with non-tribes. At the same time, no one wants to go back to the olden days when subsistence was difficult, and poverty was common. The changing material conditions are imminent and any downward movement in 'affluence' is identifiable when comparisons happen with the non-tribal people and between materially well-off neighbors in their own community. The wants are increasing and the ability to meet those are also on an upward movement. There also happens a growing disparity within the community, moving away from whatever equality or egalitarian condition existed earlier to visible disparity as seen among non-tribal societies. That is the *Original Affluence* depends on the surrounding conditions, above the worldviews, the conditions of living determined and regulated by the outside cultural conditions.

The young generation who are educated and are at school have a different view when compared to the older generations. Though the middle-aged people's generation realizes the changes that are happening and will be happening with their future generation, they still are aware of and practice the traditional systems, at least to a certain extent. The youngest generation is mostly looking outward from their tribal culture and traditional life and in terms of physical location too, they want to move out. They realize that the traditional economic systems and even the current agriculture-based economy will not be effectively surviving in the upcoming days if extreme proper efforts are not made. There were even remarks that the differences between tribal and non-tribal cultures and identities will slowly diminish and vanish.

Conclusion

K.S. Singh, an eminent scholar on tribal research in India has made a substantial observation on the situation of the Scheduled Tribes by connecting with the future directions. He has pointed out that the tribal people will develop progressively in times to come, but at the same time will face several problems and challenges (Singh,

1997: 87-88). Only when such challenges are addressed effectively the tribal people will have a better future. He observes that the environmental conditions where they inhabit are degrading, conflicts with the modern institutions will intensify, intensive marketization of tribal economy will happen, urbanization and even criminalization, including alcoholism, will increase, gender issues, stress, and overall inequalities will grow and so goes his observation. Intensive measures with regard to the preservation of traditional livelihood systems, forest rights, and unique cultural identities, including language, rights of women, and right over land, etc. are some of the key aspects that require special consideration for a promising future of tribal people (Singh, 1997: 90-91). Regardless of this, change is imminent and adaptation to the future scenarios without compromising the rights and traditional privileges is the only hopeful best path the tribal communities have. It is at this juncture we need to look at the aspirations of the young generation and processes of social change, especially with regard to acculturation phenomena, both theoretically and practically.

Based on the various observable changes and also from the changes in aspirations (behavioral aspects), we can identify that the socio-cultural change among the tribal communities is a fact. There are internal as well as external forces behind them, in terms of modernization, urbanization, economic and political factors, and such. The changes are happening through various mechanisms, and processes of diffusion and acculturation. Forced changes are also there, mostly initiated by the state and its various functionaries from the forest department, public distribution system, medical and education facilities, etc. The diffusion of innovations to the people is not much different from the case of the non-tribal population. Depending upon the very specific matter, the community (as well as individuals too), takes different acculturative strategies, integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization. There is a variation observable across generations, but most prominently, an integration anticipated by the present (middle-aged and working) generation and possible assimilative trend and behavior shown by the youngest generation. Through various processes, the characteristics of tribal people as a community are changing, though living in specific geographic settings, the diversity is increasing and becoming heterogeneous. The structural rigidity of the system plays a major role in it and a tight system, that is even connected to the economic and cultural features, tends to preserve the community character longer like in the case of the Muthuvan, than one with a loose system like that of the Hill Pulaya.

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