

TRANSFORMATIONS OF TRIBAL ECONOMY IN KERALA

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Abstract: This paper analyses the transformations of tribal economy in Kerala with reference to the economic activities of the tribes of Wayanad, Idukki and Palakkad districts. The tribal economy has changed to a great extent due to the occupational diversification in the tribal areas of Kerala. At present, the tribes are in various stages of economic development. The economic activities and subsistence activities of the tribes vary from tribe to tribe. The major concentrations of tribal people are in Wayanad, Idukki and Palakkad districts in Kerala and the present paper analyses the tribal economy in terms of the economic activities of the tribes of these three districts. This is an attempt to trace out the changes happened in the tribal economy in the recent years.

Keywords: Tribal Economy, Economic Activities, Agricultural Labourers, Forest Labourers

Introduction: In Kerala, the tribal economy has transformed to a great extent due to the changes in the economic activities of the tribes. "The tribes of Kerala are in different stages of socio-cultural and techno-economic development. Some were hunters, some were/are food gatherers, and some were/are shifting cultivators. Due to the efforts for their development, some tribes could ameliorate their life, whereas a majority could not overcome the clutches of their traditions. In many instances, the tribes depend on the forest for their livelihood and those geographical and environmental factors often determine the progress of their life and livelihood" (Mahendrakumar, 2002)¹. The major concentrations of tribal people are in Wayanad, Idukki and Palakkad districts in Kerala and the present paper analyses the tribal economy in terms of the economic activities of the tribes of these three districts.

According to Census 2011², the total Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of Kerala is 484839, which constitutes 1.45 per cent of the total population of Kerala. The gender composition shows that there are 238203 males and 246636 females. The number of tribal people is highest in Wayanad District (151443), followed by the Idukki District (55815) and Palakkad Districts (48972). According to Census 2011, the highest proportion of Scheduled Tribal population has been recorded in Wayanad District and it is 18.53 per cent. In Idukki District it is 5.04 per cent and in Palakkad District it is 1.74 per cent. According to Census 2001, the Paniyan is the most populous tribe with a population of 81,940 forming 22.5 per cent of the total tribal population of Kerala. The Kurichians is the second largest tribe having a number of 32,746 forming 9 per cent of the total ST population of Kerala.

As per the new list of Scheduled Tribes of Kerala (2003), there are 36 Scheduled Tribes. The economic activities and subsistence activities of the tribes vary from tribe to tribe and it is emerged because of occupational diversification. "Occupational

diversification is defined as the development and/or proliferation and/or multiplication and/or diversification of occupations due to the introduction and/or adoption of new occupations into the existing occupations for novel social requirements" (Mahendrakumar 2006)³.

Traditionally, the Adiyans of Wayanad district were hunters and gatherers of NTFPs and at present, most of them are landless agricultural labourer and they are switching over to diversified economies of the forest villages. The Kattunayakans of Wayanad have been traditionally known as a hunting gathering tribe. Diversified economic opportunities have paved the way for the tribe to enter various work available work in the forest. "The Kattunayakan are also referred to as Thenkuruman in Tamil Nadu and Jenu Kurumba in Karnataka. Again, the Kattunayakan are also referred to as Kadu or Shola or Chola Nayakans" according to Thurston (1909)⁴. The Cholanaickan and Kattunayakan are classified separately under the five Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Kerala. "The Cholanaickan [of Nilambur in Malappuram district] gather various tubers, roots, fruits, seeds, etc., for their own consumption. They were nomads and food gatherers. Hunting is only a minor activity compared to fishing, gathering of tubers and fruits and roots and collection of Minor Forest Produce" (Bhanu, 1989)⁵. The Kurichians of Wayanad District relied on Punam or shifting cultivation, hunting, catching fish and collection of NTFPs. At present, most of them are settled agriculturist. The Mullukurumbas of Wayanad were shifting cultivators and at present they practise settled agriculture. The Uralikurumans of Wayanad were an artisan community and the only tribe who knows handmade pottery, blacksmithy, carpentry and basketry in Kerala. The Paniyan were traditionally engaged as wage-labourers in the paddy fields and dryland cultivation of the land owners. The Paniyans are the inhabitants of Wayanad district.

The traditional livelihood of the Aranadan was based on hunting and food gathering. Even today, they roam for hunting, collecting NTFPs, etc. Some of them have taken up diversified economic activities of forest villages.

The Eravallan are inhabitants of the Palakkad district. Tradition reveals that they were hunters and food gatherers. Modern Eravallans are either agriculturists or farm labourers. A few own land, in which they cultivate successfully. The Irular of Attappady in Palakkad district were traditionally food gatherers and hunters. They normally reside near their place of work or in close proximity to forest, wherein they hunt and collect NTFP for livelihood. Some were Ponam or shifting cultivators and presently they are practising agriculture. The Kadars of Palakkad and Thrissur Districts were hunters and food gatherers. They are one of the PVTGs of Kerala. The collection of honey and other forest produces maintained a part of their economic activities. At present, they follow various economic activities of the forest and they have taken up agriculture as their principal occupation. They cultivate pepper, coffee and rice, according to the availability of land. The Kurumbas of Palakkad district were semi-nomadic and practised shifting cultivation. The Kurumba used to practise hunting and gathering. Edible tubers, fruits, etc., are collected and consumed by them. The Mudugar of Palakkad district were hunters and food gatherers and collectors of NTFPs.

The Kanikaran or Kanikkar of Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam Districts used to practice shifting cultivation. They are also engaged in hunting and gathering occasionally. Some of them are settled agriculturist. In the interior forest, they rarely hunt animals and birds. The Kochu Velan is a synonym Ulladan. The Kochu Velans are inhabitants of the Pathanamthitta District. They were shifting cultivators. Malai Pandaram are concentrated in Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Kollam Districts. They were hunters and food gatherers, and used to collect NTFPs. They also catch fish and tortoise from the forest streams. Roots, yams, etc., were the principle part of their food. Malai Vedans were subsisted on hunting traditionally and collecting NTFPs. At present, most of them are engaged as labourers in farms, plantations, etc. The Malakuravan are the inhabitants of Kottayam, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram districts. They used to hunt animals and collect NTFPs. At present, they are settled cultivators. The Palleyan subsisted by hunting and collecting NTFPs, and now they are agriculturists.

The Hill Pulaya are the inhabitants of Idukki district are known as Mala Pulaya. They are horticulturists and agriculturists. Malai Arayan of Idukki district is also called as Malayarayar. They are settled

agriculturists. A good number of the Malayarayar have attained considerable development. The Mannans were shifting cultivators and inhabitants of Idukki district. Hunting, gathering, and collection of NTFPs were the traditional pattern of subsistence. At present, they are settled cultivators. The Muduvan of Idukki district cultivate tapioca and also used to collect NTFPs. A group of the Ulladan is also known as Mala Ulladan and they were shifting cultivators and also used to hunt animals. At present, they are engaged in horticultural activities and farming tapioca, pepper, etc. The Mala Ulladans are distributed in Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts. Some of them continue to collect medicinal plants from the forest and sell them for their livelihood. The Uraly are the inhabitants of the Idukki district. Their traditional occupations were food gathering, hunting, fishing and shifting cultivation. They used to collect NTFPs for subsistence. They are now working as agricultural labourers and some cultivate paddy, tapioca, sweet potato, pulses, etc.

Earlier, the Koragas were scavengers and beggars. Basketry making is the only activity connected with their traditional economic activity. They are one of the PVTGs of Kerala and are concentrated in Kasaragod District. The Kudiya or Malakudi are the inhabitants of Kasaragod District. Traditionally, they practised cattle rearing and domestication of pig, etc. Some of them are agriculturists and others have adopted plantation labour as secondary source of living.

The Maha Malasar is also referred to as Malai Malasar. They were leading a nomadic way of life. Hunting and food gathering were the other mode of subsistence inaccessible forest areas of Thekkadi and Parambikulam. The Malasar are inhabitants of Palakkad and Thrissur districts. Earlier, they were collecting NTFPs and practising shifting cultivation. At present, they have become plantation labourers and some are settled cultivators. They carry out rearing of cattle, pigs, goats, poultry, etc., successfully. The Malayans of Thrissur district are two separate groups of Malayan, known as the Konga Malayan and Pani Malayan or Pandya Malayan. The Malayans subsisted by collecting NTFPs. Today, many of them work as wage-labourers.

Economic Activities of Tribal Households in Wayanad District

Sl. No.	Economic Activities	Households	%
1.	NTFP Collection	156	0.43
2.	Agriculture	1872	5.18
3.	Production of Traditional Items	15	0.04
4.	Cattle Rearing	160	0.44
5.	Small Traders	31	0.09

6.	Collection of Medicinal Plants	29	0.08
7.	Agricultural Labourers	29668	82.1
8.	Forest Labourers	397	1.1
9.	MGNREGA	797	2.21
10.	Wage Labourer	757	2.09
11.	Estate Labourers	207	0.57
12.	Government/Semi Government Jobs	1418	3.92
13.	Private Sector Jobs	148	0.41
14.	Permanent Forest Labourers	19	0.05
15.	Permanent Estate Labourers	70	0.19
16.	Not employed	391	1.08
Total		36135	100

Source: ST Survey Report, KILA, 2008.

Economic Activities of Tribal Households in Idukki District

Sl. No.	Economic Activities	Households	%
1.	NTFP Collection	212	2.01
2.	Agriculture	4631	43.94
3.	Production of Traditional Items	29	0.28
4.	Cattle Rearing	53	0.5
5.	Small Traders	28	0.27
6.	Collection of Medicinal Plants	9	0.09
7.	Agricultural Labourers	3387	32.14
8.	Forest Labourers	842	7.99
9.	MGNREGA	260	2.47
10.	Wage Labourer	456	4.33
11.	Estate Labourers	46	0.44
12.	Government/Semi Government Jobs	341	3.24
13.	Private Sector Jobs	32	0.3
14.	Permanent Forest Labourers	16	0.15
15.	Permanent Estate Labourers	0	0
16.	Others	104	0.99
17.	Not employed	93	0.88
Total		10539	100

Source: ST Survey Report, KILA, 2008.

Economic Activities of Tribal Households in Palakkad District

Sl. No.	Economic Activities	Households	%
1.	NTFP Collection	592	4.48
2.	Agriculture	1039	7.86

3.	Production of Traditional Items	40	0.3
4.	Cattle Rearing	444	3.36
5.	Small Traders	34	0.26
6.	Collection of Medicinal Plants	77	0.58
7.	Agricultural Labourers	6363	48.12
8.	Forest Labourers	1287	9.73
9.	MGNREGA	927	7.01
10.	Wage Labourer	1162	8.79
11.	Estate Labourers	131	0.99
12.	Government/Semi Government Jobs	569	4.3
13.	Private Sector Jobs	50	0.38
14.	Permanent Forest Labourers	11	0.08
15.	Permanent Estate Labourers	91	0.69
16.	Not employed	406	3.07
Total		13223	100

Source: ST Survey Report, KILA, 2008.

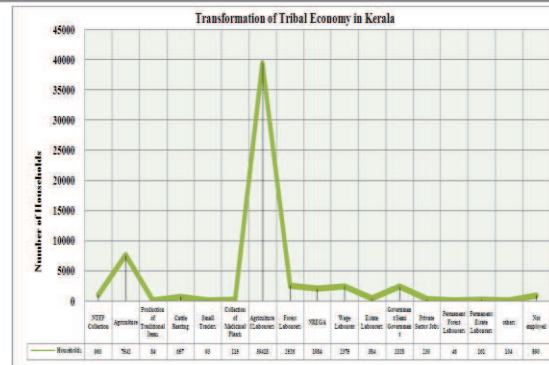
Major Transformations of Tribal Economy in Kerala:

The trend of transformations of tribal economy is derived on the basis of the economic activities of the tribes of the three major tribal concentrations, viz., Wayanad District, Idukki District and Palakkad District in Kerala.

The data shows that most of the tribes have changed from their traditional subsistence or economic activities such as hunting, gathering, shifting cultivation, etc., to other economic activities like NTFP Collection, Agriculture, Production of Traditional Items, Cattle Rearing, Small Traders, Collection of Medicinal Plants, Agricultural Labourers, Forest Labourers, MGNREGA, Wage Labourer, Estate Labourers, Government/Semi Government Jobs, Private Sector Jobs, Permanent Forest Labourers, and Permanent Estate Labourers.

Sl. No.	Economic Activities	Households	%
1	NTFP Collection	960	1.60
2	Agriculture	7542	12.59
3	Production of Traditional Items	84	0.14
4	Cattle Rearing	657	1.09
5	Small Traders	93	0.15
6	Collection of Medicinal Plants	115	0.19
7	Agricultural Labourers	39418	65.80
8	Forest Labourers	2526	4.22
9	MGNREGA	1984	3.31
10	Wage Labourer	2375	3.96

11	Estate Labourers	384	0.64
12	Government/Semi Government Jobs	2328	3.88
13	Private Sector Jobs	230	0.76
14	Permanent Forest Labourers	46	0.07
15	Permanent Estate Labourers	161	0.26
16	Others	104	0.17
17	Not employed	890	1.47
Total		59897	100



At present, 65.80 per cent of the households have become agricultural labourers. 12.59 per cent of the households became agriculturists and they are not practising shifting or slash and burn cultivation. That is 78.39 per cent of the tribes are either agriculturists or agricultural labourers. As per 2001 Census, the percentage of agricultural and allied workers is 56.6 whereas as per the present study the percentage of agricultural and allied workers belonging to the tribes of Kerala is 78.39.

The percentage of forest labourers are 4.22 and 3.96 per cent tribal households are engaged as wage-labourers. Members of only 3.88 per cent of households have got Government and Semi Government employment. 3.31 per cent of households are engaged in MGNREGA works.

Conclusions: The study points out that the transformation of tribal economy is very significant as far as tribal development is concerned. The very transformation is analysed in terms of the economic activities of the tribes and the majority of tribes of Kerala have become agricultural labourers.

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