

Livelihood Pattern of Muthuvan Tribe in Kuttampuzha Forest, Western Ghats

Santhipriya S.

Research Scholar, School of Gandhian Thought and Development studies, M.G. University, Kerala.

Abstract

Background/objectives: The Muthuvans in Kuttampuzha were the traditional reed workers in Ernakulam district (Kerala). But today the traditional reed work in Kerala is in a pathetic condition. Hence it is important to study the reasons for the breakdown of the traditional reed work and the livelihood pattern of Muthuvan community in Kuttampuzha forest.

Methods/Statistical analysis: Both primary and secondary data are used in this study. The sampling technique that was adopted for this study was simple random sampling. A structured interview schedule and observation tools were prepared and forty-five households were interviewed who belonging to Muthuva community.

Findings: The study reveals the livelihood pattern of the Muthuva community is in a pathetic situation. The agricultural pattern of the Muthuvan tribe has changed significantly, the NTFP collection is in a decreasing stage, scarcity of medicinal plants, the weaving and cutting of reed is also decreasing day by day, etc are the major livelihood issues of the Muthuvan tribe in Kuttampuzha.

Application/ improvements: In order to uplift their situation, initiative from the government is needed step for improving their livelihood condition.

Key words: Livelihood, NTFP, Muthuvan community, Tribes, Western Ghats

1. Introduction

Tribes in Kerala (Adivasis of Kerala) are the indigenous population found in the Southern Indian state of Kerala. They are considered as the most vulnerable community in the state. Most of the tribal people of Kerala live in the forests and mountains of western Ghats bordering Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. In Kerala, there are 36 communities listed as Scheduled Tribes spread over all the fourteen districts of the state. Their total population according to 2011 Census is 4,84,839 which accounts for 1.45 percentage of the total population of the state. Each community is so heterogeneous in terms of culture, belief, livelihood strategies, social organisation, economy and developmental perspectives.

The people living in the rural areas depend on the use of wild plants in their diet and have considerable resource knowledge. Traditionally they have diet association with their environment and they also have profound understanding on it. Forest covers almost one third of the world's land area, nearly almost all are inhabited by indigenous and rural communities who have customary rights to their forest and they developed ways of life and traditional knowledge. The World Bank estimates that about 240 million people live in predominantly forested eco system and depend substantially on forests for their livelihood. Tribes are said to be integral part with the forest eco-system as their habitant, has always with in it or its fringes.

The present study focuses on the livelihood pattern of Muthuva community in Kuttampuzha forest, Western Ghats. Kuttampuzha panchayat is coming under Ernakulam district. Livelihood means the occupation that generates income. Muthuva community is a tribal community living in the Kuttampuzha forest. They depend on the forest resources such as reed, bamboo and other non-timber forest products for their day- to- day life and income generation. To be specific, it tries to explore and describe the patters of dependency of Muthuvans in Kuttampuzha with their surrounding forests as a means of livelihood.



Review of Literature

Sen and Lalhrietpui (2006) in a Paper *Scheduled Tribe Bill: A View from Anthropology and Call for Dialogue* discusses about the value of forest in the life of local communities and about the Forest Right Bill.

Mohanty (2004) in his book *Encyclopaedia of Primitive Tribes in India* discusses about the means of livelihood of the tribal people in India.

Oommen (2008) discusses about the sustainable development in his journal *Reforms and the Kerala Model*. This article raises certain emerging issues relating to equity and sustainability of the Kerala Model Development

Sinha and Bahera (2010) in their report on *Changing Socio-economic Conditions and Livelihood of Geographically Isolated Tribal Community in Kandhamal and KBK Districts of Orissa*, discusses about the changing socio-economic conditions of the three selected communities in Orissa.

The objective of the study was to find out different sources of livelihood of the selected Primitive Tribal Groups and the changes in socio-economic condition.

Neuman and Hirsh (2000) in their report *Commercialisation of Non-Timber Forest Products: Review and Analysis of Research* discussed about the issues related to policies and practices bearing on the management of NTFP resources.

Ghosh and Das (1982) in their study entitled as *The Forest and the Tribe* explaining that their inter relationship revealed the balance mechanism established between forest and the tribe. The work was carried out among the Lepchas of Darjeling district, West Bengal. In this study, it was observed that the use of plant resources was absolutely governed by the ethno-ecological understanding of the people.

The paper of Manjusha K.A (2013) is an attempt to discuss the origin, history and etymology of the Muthuvans of Edamalakkudy along with the language, dress and ornaments, food pattern, traditions, rituals, religion, economy, etc. She also tries to bring out some of the problems of tribal development in this area.

Thurston and Rangachari (1987) in their book *Caste and Tribes in Southern India*, broadly discusses the history of Muthuva community.

Objectives

- To understand the livelihood conditions of the reed workers
- To find out the problem associated with the resource use of Muthuvans
- To document the extent resource dependence of Muthuvan house holds

Methodology

The study used exploratory design and ethnographical approach in collecting data. Both primary and secondary data is used in this study. Primary data is collected through interview, observation and focus group discussion, etc. and secondary data is collected from Census Report (from 1969-2011), Working Plans of Kerala Forest Department, Records and Reports of Tribal Extension Office, Kothamangalam, reports of Kuttampuzha Panchayat and Bamboo Corporation of Angamali and other regional centres. In addition, relevant supportive information from various reports of government departments, books, journals and newspaper articles are also be used.

Tools of data collection

The tools of data collection were used in this study are the structural interview schedule and observation tools.

Sampling Size

Sampling size was 45. The samples were selected from two Muthuva settlement, Mukku and Kunchipara from Kuttampuzha Panchayat. Thirty percentage of households were taken as samples from each Muthuvan settlements are 25 households from Kunchipara and 20 from Mukku through simple random sampling method. The two settlement which is selected for the study to represent the forest resource dependency of the selected Muthuva communities. Mukku settlement is selected as a sample because of it is a fringe settlement and the transport and communication facilities are accessible than other settlement. In the case of Kunchipara settlement it is located in the interior forest and the transportation facilities are not easily accessible. It needs three hours journey on foot. Thus, it helps a comparative study of resource dependents of two settlements based on different geographical locations.

Data Analysis

Gender wise Distribution

Category	Kunchipara		Mukku	
	Population	Percent	Population	Percent

Male	151	46.4	81	44.75
Female	174	53.5	100	55.2
Total	325	100	181	100

In the interior settlement total population comprises 325 and total families are 83. Male population is 151 and female is 174. In the fringe settlement there were 65 families with a total population of 181 persons. In which male population forms 44.75 percent and the female constitute 55.2 percent of their total population. Of the two settlements female population is higher than the male population.

Educational Status

Almost all the elders in the settlement are illiterates. In Mukku 61% of the total population is illiterate. However, the importance of education is recognized more by the Muthuvans now than in the past. Almost all the children under school going age are now sent to school.

Occupation of the Inhabitants

Occupation	Kunchipara (N=25)		Mukku (N=20)	
	No.of Families	Percent	No.of Families	Percent
Agriculture	24	96	16	80
Wage Labor	21	84	16	80
NREGA	20	80	18	72
ReedBased Job	20	80	12	60
Other NTFP	23	92	8	40
Govt.Sector Job	-	-	1	5

The occupation and income sources of Muthuvans are from different sectors like agriculture, wage labour, NREGA, NTFP and reed-based jobs. Most of the Individuals do not confine with one specific sector whereas they engaged in more than one of the above areas based on the skills, availability of work and season. A substantial portion of income is derived from Agriculture and wage labour. Working as labour in the fields of neighbourhood non-tribal families and in the plantations managed by the State forest department is a main source of daily wage. In the interior settlement 92 percent families earn their income from NTFP collection. But in the fringe settlement only 40 percent people earn income from NTFP collection. At the fringe settlement 80 percent families depend on Agriculture for their living. Income from agriculture is mainly from cash crops such as cocoa, areca nut and rubber. While 80 and 60 percent draw their income from wage labour and reed-based job respectively in the fringe settlement. NREGA is another source of income of the women in the settlements. The wage gets from NREGA is rupees 212.

Number of Edible items Collected from surroundings

Items	Kunchipara (N=25)		Mukku (N=20)	
	No.of Respondents	Percent	No.of Respondents	Percent

Fruits	16	64	6	30
Tubers	16	64	13	65
Edible Leaves	21	84	16	80
Seed& Nuts	10	40	9	45

Collection of edible items is a common feature in all tribal settlements. In the interior settlement, 84 percent of families collect edible leaves and 64 percent of fruits. In the fringe settlement family members collected 80 percent collect fruit and 65 percent tubers. When comparing both the settlements, the collection and use of edible items in fringe settlement families is lesser than the interior settlement. It is because of their increasing income level and easier availability of other food items from the nearby market and PDS outlet.

Proportion of Men and Women in Gathering

Members	Kunchipara (N=25)		Mukku (N=20)	
	No.of Families	Percent	No.of Families	Percent
Women	20	80	18	72
Men	6	24	5	20

Women are the predominant collectors of edible items from surroundings. In the interior settlement 80 percent of women collect edible items from their surroundings for daily needs. In fringe area settlement 72 percent women engaged in this job. The male participation in collection is little in each settlement. The reason may be that the male members are either go alone in forest or engaged in other activities such as wage labor or reed cutting.

Collection of Wild Edibles for Own Use

Items	Kunchipara (N=25)		Mukku (N=20)	
	No. of Families	Percent	No. of Families	Percent
Wild Yams	13	52	14	70
Fruits	10	40	6	30
Nuts	8	32	6	30
Leaves	16	64	5	25
Mushrooms	10	40	10	50
Fish/Wild Meat	8	32	6	30

64 percent households of the interior settlement collect leaves 52 percent gather wild yams. Other items of collection are fruits, mushrooms, nuts and fishes from the nearby streams. In the fringe settlement 70 percent gather wild yams and 50 percent collect wild mushrooms.

Collection of NTFP for Sale

Items	Kunchipara (N=25)		Mukku(N=20)	
	No.of Families	Percent	No. of Families	Percent
	Honey	22	88	9
Pathri	19	76	7	35
Kodampuli	10	40	6	30
Thelli	17	68	5	25

A substantial portion of their income is generated through the collection of Non-Wood Forest Produces which include, honey, *Pathri*, Kodampuli and *Thelli* (Black Dammar). Among Muthuvan NTFP collectors, black dammar is known as *thelli* and Myristica as *pathri*. Honey is a major NTFP collected from the forest for sale. 88 percent of households in the interior settlement and 45 percent in the fringe settlement gather honey. However, collection of NTFPs being seasonal, it does not ensure them a steady income throughout the year. Black Dammar is rare to get in the forest. The availability of Black Dammar is only up to 50 kg in a year per family. The NTFPs items gathered in the monsoon season (June-July) are much less than compared with other seasons. Collection and storage of NTFPs is also very difficult during the wet season. The percentage of collection of NTFPs in the interior settlement is higher than the fringe settlement. In the fringe settlement they have to travel longer distance for getting NTFPs and hence most of them gave off NTFP collection and engaged in other wage labor activities.

Conclusion

Muthuvan tribes in Kuttampuzha panchayath are the traditional collectors of forest produces, reed and bamboo. Until recently these items contribute significant portion of their livelihood. For the past 30 years, changes are occurring in their socio-cultural aspects, agricultural pattern and in the use of forest produces. About 30 years ago household from both interior as well as fringe settlement cultivated rice in their settlement. Rice, tapioca and arrowroot constituted the staple food item of the inhabitants. But in the present time (during the study period) rice is not cultivated, except one family in a small area in the interior settlement. Rather they consume rice from the market and PDS outlets. Tapioca and arrowroot are cultivated in the homesteads even now. The agricultural patterns of the Muthuvan tribe in Kuttampuzha panchayath are also changed significantly. Cash crops like cocoa, arecanut, rubber etc are the predominant cultivation in the fringe settlement. Whereas in the interior settlement arecanut and rubber are common and cocoa is cultivated to some extent. Shifting cultivation is not practiced in both settlements.

The products available in Kuttampuzha forests are wild edibles, medicinal plants, NTFPs, bamboo and reed. The forest produces are collected by the Muthuvans for own use and for sale. There is a decreasing trend is observed in the households that engaged in NTFP collection. People living in the interior settlement depend on forest resources more than the fringe households. Nowadays most of the forest produces are scarce. Availability of medicinal plants from the forest is also minimal. Hence collection of medicinal plants for sale is also nil. In addition, the younger generations are ignorant about the knowledge of medicinal plants and other produces. Only the elderly persons in the settlements are informed about the names and its usage. Fishing from the jungle streams is also found very minimal level. Due to the scarcity of fish in the streams and reservoir in the recent years they depend largely on the sea fish sold in the market.

The weaving and cutting of reeds are also decreasing. The heavy work load and minimum wage prompted them to divert in to other

jobs with less burden and more income. More people engaged in wage labor and NREGA than reed-based job. At present only about, 50 percent households engaged in reed-based job. However higher proportion of respondents opt for income from wage labor and NREGA. Attack by elephants in recent years is also a reason mentioned by few respondents for giving up reed cutting. The youth members of the settlement prefer easier jobs like wage labor, NREGA and cash crop cultivation.

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