

Land Alienation and Access To Common Property Resources among Tribal Agricultural Labourers of Wayanad District: A Critical Gender Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The present investigation has been done on the basis of qualitative and quantitative data collected from primary sources and explored the land alienation and land ownership status of tribal agricultural labourers. It also investigates how social discrimination aggravates the extent of land alienation and influence the land ownership and access to common property resources among the tribal people. While considering the inter-community disparity in land ownership, Kurichiya community owned more land than Paniya community, whereas, Kattunaikan owned no land and remained landless. Majority of the tribal people, especially women experienced high degree of land alienation. The major methods of land alienation identified were marriage of tribal women with non-tribal men, mortgaging the land by the tribal people to the non-tribal people in return for credit. The major consequences of land alienation as perceived by the tribal agricultural labourers were widening gap between the rich and the poor tribal people, increased poverty, exploitation, confrontation between tribal and non-tribal people, migration, law and order problem in tribal areas and marginalization and exclusion. In the case of access to common property resources, Kurichiya community had better access to community well/ tap, forest produces, common land resources and water resources than Paniya and Kattunaikan communities.

Keywords: Land alienation, access to common property resources, social discrimination, Wayanad, Kattunaikan, Paniya, Kurichiya.

INTRODUCTION

Wayanad is the district in Kerala with the highest population of tribal people. As per the Census 2011, the total population in Wayanad

district is 8, 17,420 of which 1, 51,443 are Adivasis, hence constituting 18.5 per cent of the total Adivasi population in the district.

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There are 11 tribal communities in Wayanad. They are the *Paniya*, *Kurichiya*, *Kurumar/Mullu Kuruma*, *Adiya*, *Vettakuruman*, *Kattunaickan*, *Wayanad Kadar*, *Mala Araya*, *Karimpalan*, *Ulladan* and *Thachanadan Mooppan*. Among the tribal communities of Wayanad, forest-dependent community like the *Kattunaickan* and artisan community like the *Uralikuruma*, the *Adiya* and the *Paniya*, who are traditionally bonded labourers are the most vulnerable sections of tribal communities. Traditional cultivator communities like *Mullu Kuruma* and *Kurichiya* comparatively occupy a competent position than the rest of the tribal population due to their resourcefulness.

The *Kattunaickan* community is classified as ‘primitive tribes’ or Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG) by the Government of India due to their isolative nature from the rest of the communities. This community was traditionally hunters and gatherers. Their main economic activity is the collection of Non-Timber Forest Produces. The community inhabits mainly in the area within the forests or in the fringes. A very few of them are having marginal land holdings. *Paniya* is the largest *Adivasi* community in Wayanad constituting 45.12% of the total *Adivasi* population in the district. The word ‘*Paniya*’ means ‘labourer’ and they believe that their original occupation was agriculture. This community almost entirely depends on agricultural labour for their livelihood. They speak a language of their own. *Kurichiya* is the second largest community among the tribal population. They are the first agricultural tribe to have settled in the district. They are the traditional farmers. Till recently, the *Kurichiya* were following the joint family system and community heads had much authority and influence over its members. But now they follow nuclear family system. They are well known for their martial tradition. It has been identified with that of the South Dravidian family, closely related to Malayalam; with borrowings from Kannada and Tamil.

The main problem of indigenous people regarding their traditional occupations

is the lack of recognition of their rights to lands, territories and resources. Many communities are marginalized and alienated due to land grabbing, large scale developmental projects, population transfer, establishment of protected areas etc. It also resulted in malnutrition, poor education health problems, increasing poverty and un and under employment, out-migration from indigenous lands and destructions of social fabric and cultural institutions (ILO, 2007). Hence, the present study investigates the ownership of land by the tribals, the extent of land alienation among the tribal communities, their access to common property resources and the influence of the above aspects on social discrimination.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Mananthavady block was purposely selected for the study since the block records the highest concentration of tribal population among the other blocks. The tribal communities concerned in the study were *Kattunaikans*, *Paniyas* and *Kurichiyas*. From the block, two panchayats- *Thavinhal* and *Edamunda* with the highest population of *Kattunaikans*, *Paniyas* and *Kurichiyas* respectively were selected for the study.

From each selected panchayat, 30 men and 30 women tribal agricultural labourers were randomly selected. Thus, 60 agricultural labourers were selected from *Kattunaikan*, *Paniya* and *Kurichiya* communities respectively and thereby, a total of 180 respondents were selected for the study. Pretested interview schedule was used to collect primary data from the respondents. Focus group discussions, observation methods and other selected participatory tools was also used. Frequency, mean, percentage and simple correlation tests were used for the analysis.

Size of landholding

Size of landholding refers to the actual land owned by the respondent and have the rights and control over it and its resources for a secure living. The scoring procedure developed by Balakrishnan (2017) was employed.

Size of landholding (in cents)	Score
No land	1
5-10	2
11-25	3
26-50	4
51-100	5
101-250	6
251 and above	7

Access to common property resources

Common property resources of the respondents were identified and rated based on his/her access, quality and current status and level of access or restrictions. A scoring

procedure developed by Anoop (2013) with slight modification was used for the measurement of access to common property resources.

The scaling procedure is as follows:

Sl. no.	Common property resources	Level of access		
		Unlimited / Unrestricted (3)	Moderately restricted (2)	Highly restricted (1)
1	Community well/ tap			
2	Forest			
	Minor forest produce			
	Medicinal plants			
	Honey			
	Fruits			
	Fuel wood			
3	Common land resources			
4	Water resources (rivers, ponds etc.)			

Land alienation

Land alienation is operationally defined as the loss of tribal lands to non-tribals or Govt. agencies. The order of land alienation was assessed by employing procedure developed by Nazer (2010) with suitable modifications. A score of 2 was given for 'Yes' and 1 for 'No'. The statements used to measure their feelings and perception about land alienation was administered to the respondents.

owned 51 to 100 cents of land, followed by 33.33 per cent of the men and women each without any land. About 14.44 per cent of the men owned 101 to 250 cents of land, followed by 8.89 per cent of the men and 20 per cent of the women owning 26 to 50 cents, 3.33 per cent of the male and 13.33 per cent of the female tribal agricultural labourers owned 11 to 25 cents and 1.11 per cent of the men agricultural labourers and 6.67 per cent of the women agricultural labourers owned 5 to 10 cents of land.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Size of land holding

By seeing the overall data, 38.9 per cent of the male agricultural labourers and 26.67 per cent

Table 1: Distribution of respondents based on size of land holding

Category (in cents)	Kattunaikan				Paniya				Kurichiya				Overall (N= 180)			
	Male (n= 30)		Female (n= 30)		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
No land	30	100	30	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	33.33	30	33.33
5 to 10	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	20	1	3.34	0	0	1	1.11	6	6.67
11 to 25	0	0	0	0	3	10	12	40	0	0	0	0	3	3.33	12	13.33
26 to 50	0	0	0	0	5	16.67	7	23.33	3	10	9	30	8	8.89	18	20
51 to 100	0	0	0	0	22	73.33	2	6.67	13	43.33	21	70	35	38.9	24	26.67
101 to 250	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	43.33	0	0	13	14.44	0	0

In *Kattunaikan* community, none of the male or female agricultural labourers owned land. They encroached Government lands, built huts and occupied the land.

Among *Paniya* community, more than seventy per cent of the male and 6.67 per cent of the female *Paniya* owned 51 to 100 cents. Only a minor share of the *Paniya* population (16.67% of the males and 23.33% of the females owned 26 to 50 cents), while 10 per cent of the male respondents and 40 per cent of the female respondents owned 11 to 25 cents. About 20 per cent of the *Paniya* women owned 5 to 10 cents.

In the case of *Kurichiya* community, 43.33 per cent of the males owned 101 to 250 cents, while another 43.33 per cent of the men and 70 per cent of the women owned land of 101 to 250 cents.

Paniya owned land which was free distribution of land by Government of Kerala and *Kurichiya* owned lands which they got as hereditary. None of the male or female tribal agricultural labourers owned land above 250 cents.

While considering the inter-community disparity in land ownership, *Kurichiya* community owned more land than *Paniya* community due to the better socioeconomic status of the former, whereas, *Kattunaikan* owned no land and remained landless. The average size of landholding among traditionally landowning communities such as *Kurichiya*, is much above other tribal communities. This is seen to be associated with their better status in the society. *Kurichiya* is agrarian community and hence had lands which were mostly family property. The results are on par with the results of Paul (2013).

Access to common property resources

From the Table 2, it is clear that majority (86.67% men and 96.67% women) of the agricultural labourers of *Kattunaikan* community had highly restricted access to community wells/ taps. The main source of drinking water was a spring inside the forest from where, through pipeline they collected water. But most of the time, there was

hindrance in the pipeline connection due to animal attack. But while coming to minor forest produce, *Kattunaikan* had moderately limited access. They are provided with special pass for their entry into the forest. They mainly collect honey and minor timber woods, which they sell in the co-operatives. In the case of common land resources, majority (83.33%) of the men and 6.67 per cent of the women had moderately limited access to common property resources, while 10 per cent of the men and majority (93.33%) of the women had highly restricted access. In the case of water resources, majority of the respondents (86.67% of the men and 80% of the women) had unlimited access, followed by 16.67 per cent of the men and 3.33 per cent of the women with moderately limited access and 3.33 per cent of the men and 16.67 per cent of the women with highly restricted access.

In the case of *Paniya* community, half of the men and 36.67 per cent of the women agricultural labourers had unlimited/ unrestricted access to community well/ tap. The panchayat has common well which gave easy access to the tribal people. Besides this, those people living away from the vicinity of the community well had moderately to highly restricted access to the community well. Even though community well is a boon to many tribal people, the long distances between the community well and the tribal settlements limits their access. Considering the aspect of minor forest produce, majority (80%) of the men and 43.33 per cent of the women had moderately limited access, while 20 per cent of the men and 56.67 per cent women had highly restricted access. They rarely go to forest and if so, they collect minor timber woods. More than half of the men and women had unlimited/ unrestricted access to common property resources, while 43.33 per cent of the men and 33.33 per cent of the women had moderately limited access. Only 6.67 per cent of the women had highly restricted access to common land resources. In the case of water resources, more than half of the men and women had unlimited/ unrestricted access, followed by 36.67 per cent of the men and

46.67 per cent of women having moderately limited access.

Compared to *Paniya* and *Kattunaikan* community, *Kurichiya* community had better access to resources. Majority (93.33%) of the *Kurichiya* men and 43.33 per cent women had unlimited access to community well/ taps, while 6.67% of the men and 43.33 per cent women had moderately limited access and 13.34 per cent of women had highly restricted access. *Kurichiya* never go to forest, thus having moderately to highly restricted access to minor forest produce. As they had skill in using bows and arrows, they used to hunt animals, but the new forest policies had delimited their entry to the restricted forest areas. Majority (93.33%) of the men and 73.33 per cent of women had unlimited/ unrestricted access to common land resources, followed by 6.67 per cent of the men and 26.67 women having moderately limited access. Majority

(90%) of the men and 76.67 per cent women had unlimited access to water resources, followed by 10 per cent of the men and 13.33 per cent women having moderately limited and 10 per cent women had highly restricted access.

The overall results show that *Kurichiya* community had better access to resources than *Paniya* and *Kattunaikan* communities, owing to their better socio-economic status. On comparing male and female agricultural labourers, female labourers had moderately to highly limited access to resources, while male labourers had unlimited to moderately limited access. The distance between their localities and resources and also frequent animal attack and security concerns for the women limits their access to resources. The results are on par with the results of Aerthayil (2008) and Narayanan (2016).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on access to common property resources

Category	<i>Kattunaikan</i>				<i>Paniya</i>				<i>Kurichiya</i>				Overall (N= 180)				
	Male (n= 30)		Female (n= 30)		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Community Well/ tap																	
Unlimited/ unrestricted	0	0	0	0	15	50	11	36.67	28	93.33	13	43.33	43	47.78	24	26.67	
Moderately limited	4	13.33	1	3.33	11	36.67	13	43.33	2	6.67	13	43.33	17	18.89	27	30	
Highly restricted	26	86.67	29	96.67	4	13.33	6	20	0	0	4	13.34	30	33.33	39	43.33	
Minor forest produce																	
Unlimited/ unrestricted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Moderately limited	30	100	2	6.67	24	80	13	43.33	30	100	16	53.33	84	93.33	31	34.44	
Highly restricted	0	0	28	93.33	6	20	17	56.67	0	0	14	46.67	6	6.67	59	65.56	
Common land resources																	
Unlimited/ unrestricted	0	0	0	0	17	56.67	18	60	28	93.33	22	73.33	45	50	40	44.44	
Moderately limited	25	83.33	2	6.67	13	43.33	10	33.33	2	6.67	8	26.67	40	44.44	20	22.22	
Highly restricted	3	10	28	93.33	0	0	2	6.67	0	0	0	0	5	5.56	30	33.33	
Water resources																	
Unlimited/ unrestricted	26	86.67	24	80	19	63.33	16	53.33	27	90	23	76.67	72	80	63	70	
Moderately limited	5	16.67	1	3.33	11	36.67	14	46.67	3	10	4	13.33	17	18.89	19	21.11	
Highly restricted	1	3.33	5	16.67	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	10	1	1.11	8	8.89	

Land alienation

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents based on land alienation.

Land alienation is still a menace for tribal people, as their lands are taken away from their hands, either by the Government agencies for Govt. projects or other multi-national companies. Among all the three tribal communities, a high degree of land alienation was observed. By scrutinizing the overall data, majority (93.33% of the men and 90% women) experienced high extent of land alienation, whereas, 6.67 per cent of men and 10 per cent women experienced low degree of land alienation. Women experienced high degree of land alienation than their male counterparts. This might be due to the lack of awareness of the laws for the protection of tribal lands.

In the case of *Kattunaika* community, only 6.67 per cent of the men experienced low degree of land alienation, while majority (93.33%) of the men and all women experienced high degree of land alienation.

Sixty per cent of the male agricultural labourers and 83.33 per cent of the female *Paniya* agricultural labourers faced greater extent of land alienation, while 40 per cent men and 16.67 per cent women experienced low degree of land alienation.

In the case of *Kurichiya* community, 56.67 per cent men and 86.67 per women experienced high degree of land alienation, while 43.33 per cent men and 13.33 per cent women faced low degree of land alienation.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents based on land alienation

Category	<i>Kattunaikan</i>				<i>Paniya</i>				<i>Kurichiya</i>				Overall (N= 180)			
	Male (n= 30)		Female (n= 30)		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Low	2	6.67	0	0	12	40	4	13.33	13	43.33	5	16.67	33	6.67	9	10
High	28	93.33	30	100	18	60	26	86.67	17	56.67	25	83.33	57	93.33	81	90

Land alienation occurs due to various reasons. The major ones being marriage of tribal women with non-tribal men, mortgaging the land by the tribal people to the non-tribal people in return for credit. The lack of proper land records also aggravates the pathetic condition of the tribal communities with regard to the ownership of lands. Majority of the tribal people belonging to *Kattunaika* and *Paniya* do not consider ownership of land important. The results are on par with Nithya (2013), Saha (2014) and Sachana and Kumar (2015).

Consequences of land alienation:

The major consequences of land alienation as perceived by the tribal agricultural labourers were widening gap between the rich and the poor tribal people, increased poverty, exploitation, confrontation between tribal and non-tribal people, migration, law and order problem in tribal areas and marginalization and exclusion. Land alienation resulted in

inter- community difference among the tribal population. Incidence of land alienation was comparatively lesser in case of *Kurichiya*, in comparison with *Paniya* and *Kattunaikan*. Due to loss of land from the tribal people, they lost their source of livelihood and ended up with extreme poverty. The tribal people were indiscriminately exploited by the non-tribal people and their land was taken away from them. The excessive dependence of tribal communities on land for their income and employment made land alienation and landlessness a major livelihood concern of the tribes. The encroachment of tribal lands by the non-tribal people resulted in confrontation between the tribal and non-tribal people, and hence, law and order problems in tribal areas. The loss of employment and livelihood forced the tribal people to migrate in search of employment and income. The results are on par with the results of Haseena (2014) and Saha (2014).

Table 4: Consequences of land alienation ranked according to their importance

Items	Total Score	Rank
Widening gap between the rich and the poor tribal people	591	1
Increased poverty	565	2
Exploitation	526	3
Decreased employment	498	4
Confrontation between tribal and non-tribal people	488	5
Migration	465	6
Law and order problem in tribal areas	379	7
Marginalization and exclusion	363	8

Influence of size of landholding, land alienation and access to common property resources on social discrimination faced by tribal agricultural labourers

Social discrimination is a growing menace in our society, where, the indigenous population is subjected to ill-treatment due to their race or culture. From the olden days, tribal people are considered to be down-trodden and less-developed people, making them vulnerable to exploitation.

Size of land holding, and access to common property resources was observed to be have a

negative effect on social discrimination, a significant effect in the case of females, while land alienation had a positive effect on social discrimination. The ownership of land and unlimited access to resources arises a sense of self-sufficiency in the minds of tribal people, making them able to resist ill-treatment. The unlimited access to resources will allow them to collect minor forest produces like honey, timber, fruits etc. Many times, tribal people are denied or restricted access to safe drinking water as community taps/ well are far from their localities.

Table 5: Correlation of social discrimination with size of landholding, access to common property resources and land alienation among male and female tribal agricultural labourers

Sl. No.	Independent variables	Correlation coefficient 'r' value	
		Men	Women
1	Size of land holding	-0.199	-0.267*
2	Access to common property resources	-0.142*	-0.147*
3	Land alienation	0.098	0.328**

**significant at 1% level

*significant at 5% level

From the above table, we can conclude that size of land holding, access to common property resources and land alienation is a clear indicator of the level of social discrimination faced by the tribal population. Small size of landholding, very less and limited access to common property resources and high degree of land alienation clearly indicates a high degree of social discrimination experienced by tribal agricultural labourers. While comparing the status of men and women, it is very significant that women face a high degree of social discrimination, wherein, they own very small or no land, very

less access to the property resources and a high extent of land alienation.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Strict supervision of transfer of tribal lands into the lands of non-tribal people.
2. Granting the title of land ownership to landless tribal people.
3. Appropriate initiatives for curbing exploitation and discrimination of tribal people especially, women.
4. Conducting awareness programmes among the tribal people about their rights, provisions in law and development programmes.

CONCLUSION

The celebrated Kerala model of development has not made much change for the socio-economic life of the marginalized sections of Kerala. Tribals have been largely left out of the gains of the Kerala model of development. In the implementation of land reforms, the legitimate claim of the Dalits, the traditional tillers of the soil, to cultivate land was never recognized. Among the few states that have achieved land reforms in Kerala did not achieve complete success in land reforms. Thus, the government should redress the grievances on land alienation and thus curb the loss of land from their hands and must have full access and control over their property and resources.

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