

Impact of Banasura Sagar Dam on the Wayanad Kadar Tribes of Kerala

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ABSTRACT The present paper attempts to understand the impact of Banasura Sagar Dam on the Wayanad Kaders, one of the Scheduled Tribes of Kerala, who were evicted from their original habitat when the dam was constructed in Wayanad District. Earlier, the Wayanad Kaders were entirely depending on agriculture for their livelihood and maintained a sustainable livelihood. But they were displaced from their original habitat and scattered to mostly barren lands in the forest areas with the implementation of the India's second largest earthen dam project. Their traditional habitat submerged inside the reservoir, which has resulted in the rehabilitation of the Wayanad Kaders in different areas in Wayanad District. In the post displacement phase, the community was facing huge challenges of livelihood transition as they neither integrated nor assimilated into the new habitats and the problems related to the tribal displacement was continuing endlessly. The present study is an attempt to understand the ground realities of the impact of displacement on the livelihood and socio-economic life of the Wayanad Kaders of Kerala.

INTRODUCTION

Tribal displacement and resettlement are the worst experiences faced by the tribal societies as it interferes with their way of life and with the problems of adaptation. The centuries old customs, practices and environmental adaptations mould the survival strategy of the tribes, which are suddenly subjected to change when they are rehabilitated to an entirely different environment. Adoba et al. (2019) have reviewed the risks faced by the communities of developing countries like China, India, Zambia and Ghana due to the development induced displacement, which has pointed out that a large number of people have become homeless, landless, jobless and also lost their socio-economic conditions. Kumar and Mishra (2018) have pointed out the problems related to the development induced displacement from the indigenous perspective. After the tribal displacement and with the changing habitat, the tribal communities are being exposed to new socio-cultural context, which demands new skills and that is altogether different from what they possessed. The immediate and elongated reactions to these developments resulted in a new strategy of survival. Hence, the displacement and resettlement have to be assessed on the backdrop of new occupational attainments.

The displaced tribal people are facing various stresses like social, cultural, economic and psychological due to the breakdown of their traditional livelihood and lifestyle. People are forced to leave their traditional abode and their means of subsistence due to the compulsory acquisition of land for the construction of dams, industries, roads, National Parks, etc. Development proves that it is beneficial to a section of population but it is at the cost of livelihood of other sections of the society.

Most of the development projects are located in forest areas, which are occupied by indigenous communities and hence the tribes are the most affected group of people. The people displaced for developmental projects are deprived of their traditional livelihood without any alternatives. The worst sufferers of developmental projects are the tribal communities because most of the development projects such as dams and industries are located in tribal areas. The tribes, the original inhabitants were pushed into the uninhabitable area by various invaders and also due to various development projects.

The displacement destroys not only the physical environment but also socio-cultural, political and economic network. All the development programmes tend to replace the existing set of relations. In the words of Sarma (2017), "most of the development projects in India, in

the name of National development, have been established in remote areas and tribal areas where plenty of land is there for acquisition. The entire process is uprooting people from their sources of livelihood and proper resettlement and rehabilitation of these people are not happening in most of the states. As most of them are part of an informal economy, it becomes difficult for them to adjust to a formal economy or urban set up and livelihood. This has led to impoverishment of the marginalized people in many fronts.”

The Scheduled Tribes in India are characterised by economic and social marginalisation. Economy is one of the major subsystems of any social system. Livelihood comprises the activities required for acquiring means of living, the capacities and assets including both material and social resources. According to Long (2000), “livelihood best expresses the idea of individuals and groups striving to make a living, attempting to meet their various consumption and economic necessities, coping with uncertainties, responding to new opportunities, and choosing between different value positions.” Livelihood is more than just a matter of finding food, shelter and clothing, it means that the processes by which the people attain the needs of life, which may vary from society to society. Hogger (2004) has rightly stated that, “understanding the livelihood systems of the poor is crucial to effective poverty reduction. Livelihood of the poor can never be understood in any track logic be it economic, social, technical, cultural or political. The livelihood systems are made of very diverse elements which taken together constitute the physical, economic, social and cultural wherein families live.”

The Wayanad Kadars were displaced from their original habitat due to the construction of the Banasura Sagar Dam in 1979 in Wayanad District of Kerala. The dam construction resulted in the total destruction of their economy due to the submergence of their cultivable lands inside the dam. The Banasura Sagar Dam was constructed as a part of an irrigation project in Wayanad District. This is the second largest Earthen Dam in Asia and the largest Earthen Dam in India. This dam is built across Karamanthode, a tributary of Panamaram River in Wayanad District. According to the Kerala State Planning Board, the ultimate benefit of the dam and canal system is to irrigate 4740 hectares (gross) and

2,800 hectares (net) in Wayanad District. As a part of the establishment of the dam, the Wayanad Kadars were relocated and settled even to the forest areas, which ultimately resulted in the end of cultivation in their paddy fields. The dam project has virtually taken away their livelihood as well as their cultivable land, which is filled with water of the dam. In this context, the study intends to examine the impact of the development programmes on the Wayanad Kadars. The development through dams and its interconnection with displacement of the tribal communities are attaining significance in recent decades.

The Wayanad Kadars are one of the Scheduled Tribes of Kerala, and they are facing the after effects of displacement from their original habitat at the time of the construction of the Banasura Sagar Dam. At present, the displacement has resulted in the disintegration and impoverishment among the Wayanad Kadars. This is also resulted in their resettlement at different areas and as a part of the resettlement policy decisions of the Government. In the post displacement phase, the community has faced critical challenges of livelihood transition as they either have to integrate or assimilate in the new habitat wherein they face a lot of problems. In this context, some important literatures related to the present research topic are reviewed to identify the trend of such studies.

Mahendrakumar (2005) has published an article on the Kadars of Central Kerala. This study gives an analysis on eco-cultural adaptations and socio-economic changes among the Kadars of Central Kerala. It analyses the problems faced by the Kadars during the transitional stage of their subsistence activity. Baviskar (1995) has made an account of the Narmada valley project and he says that the wealth of the earth is being appropriated by the elites leading to the impoverishment of vast human masses who largely depend on natural resources. This study concludes that the claim of development becomes meaningless for such deprived tribes who have lost their identity. Behera (2011) studied about the displacement due to the construction of a medium irrigation project of Western Orissa. The study provides a brief account of the pre and post economic conditions of the displaced people. Dungdung (2013) studied the agony of 57 families who were displaced in 1983 during the

construction of Malay Dam, situated at Satbarwa Block of Palamau District in Jharkhand, which discloses the struggling of the families for the survival after being betrayed in the name of compensation, rehabilitation and development. Rao (2017) has made a study on tribal land question in Andhra Pradesh and it focussed on the scheduled areas in the East Godavari District. This study highlights the nexus between the non-tribal entrants into tribal areas, political parties and the state, which has been party to land alienation among the tribes. Bandyopadhyay (2018) conducted a study among the four Birhor settlements, namely, Bhupatipally, Bareria, Bersa and Madhultanr in the District of Purulia. It looked into the changing livelihood pattern of the Birhor and salient features of the impact of development measures initiated by the Government. Majumder (2019) conducted a study among a group of peasant families who had lost their cultivable land for the establishment of a heavy industry, in the village Gokulpur under Kharagpur-1 Block in Paschim Medinipur District in West Bengal. It discussed about the changing social structure of the land loser families due to the acquisition of land by the Government for the establishment of this industry.

The above review of literature shows the trend of studies on the impact of development programmes on the tribes and tribal displacement. In this context, the following objectives are formulated to study the tribal displacement and the impact of the Banasura Sagar Dam on the Wayanad Kadars of Kerala.

Objectives

- ◆ To study the impact of Banasura Sagar Dam among the Wayanad Kadars of Kerala; and
- ◆ To understand the tribal displacement and the changes in livelihood among the Wayanad Kadars.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In Kerala, the Wayanad Kadars are distributed in Wayanad District alone and therefore the area of study is confined to Wayanad district alone. The Wayanad Kadar, a Scheduled Tribe, is a marginal community. The Malayalam word “Kadar” is the plural form of *Kadan* mean-

ing forest dweller, which is derived from the word “Kadu”, meaning forest. The Wayanad Kadars are known as *Kadar* among themselves. The prefix Wayanad is used to differentiate this group from the Kadars of Thrissur District of Kerala. The number of Kadar families in Wayanad district is 174, with a total population of 673 and it consists of 348 males and 325 females. The distribution of population is given in Table 1. The Wayanad Kadars are distributed in 11 Grama Panchayats, however, they are mainly located in Thariyode, Vellamunda, Thondarnad, Edavaka, Pozhuthana and Padinjarethara Grama Panchayats. They are settled in different villages and interacting with other people, which has brought significant changes in their life and culture. The Wayanad Kadars are one of the early inhabitants of Wayanad District of Kerala.

Table 1: Distribution of population of the Wayanad Kadars

Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total	Percent
348	51.70	325	48.30	673	100

Source: Report - Scheduled tribes of Kerala 2008

For the present study, various anthropological research methods have been used such as intensive fieldwork, household survey, interviews and non-participant observation. Household survey was the main source of data collection for the present study. The 100 households of the Wayanad Kadars were selected for the present study. The household survey helped to collect data about the size and type of the families, age group, education, sex ratio, occupational status, etc. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used. All the Wayanad Kadar families displaced due to the Banasura Sagar Project were contacted during fieldwork. Interviews and group discussions were conducted to collect data.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The traditional occupations of the Wayanad Kadars consisted of agriculture and hunting and gathering. Their farming was a collective work. They practised shifting cultivation on the hill slopes and that places are submerged inside the dam at present. They classified their territory

based on the names of the hills and on the hill slopes. They cultivated different types of food grains like paddy, ragi, millets, mustard, corn, etc. Their shifting cultivation had different stages like selection and clearing of forest, burning and removing of weeds, sowing of the seeds, weeding, watching of the crops, harvesting and worshipping. They had several varieties of paddy including wet land paddy such as *Veliyan*, *Thondi* and dry land paddy known as *Karathan* (*Karinellu*). In Thariyode, the Wayanad Kadars were mainly settled in three villages namely, Chellad, Kodumchola and Vengakolly. Earlier, the important items cultivated in that area were pepper, coffee, cardamom, ragi, *thaila pullu*, *ramacham*, *thina*, *chama*, tubers, rice and vegetables.

Traditionally, the Wayanad Kadars were experts in the use of bow and arrows, made of bamboo, and they used to hunt wild boar, deer, rabbit, etc. The economic activities of men were restricted to hunting and collecting and women were engaged in shifting cultivation. The items collected were different types of tubers, fruits, leaves and honey. Even today, some of them are continuing fishing and both men and women are participating in it. They also dry fish with salt and preserve it for future. At present, those who own land, cultivate paddy, tapioca, plantain, pepper, coffee, ginger, jack, mango, etc. Their cultivation was depended on the rains. They followed organic cultivation. Some of them are also engaged in animal husbandry. At present, they are depending on the markets for all their requirements.

The traditional way of life of the Wayanad Kadars have changed as has been pointed out by the finding of Aboda et al. (2019) and Kumar and Mishra (2018). Bandyopadhyay (2018), Rao (2017), Dungdung (2013), Behera (2011) and Baviskar (1995) have pointed out the issues of tribal displacement in the context of development projects, which is also compatible to the present observation. The Wayanad Kadars were scattered from their original habitat only because of the large-scale development project, the Banasura Sagar Dam. This has resulted in the tribal displacement as well as extensive changes in their livelihood and livelihood activities.

Tribal Displacement and Changes in Livelihood

At present, after the displacement from their original habitats, the income of the Wayanad

Kadars has been declined due to the reduction in the area of farmland. The livelihood patterns have completely changed. As per the present survey, the number of agricultural and wage labourers have increased. The degradation of natural forests has reduced the availability of wild edible and commercial produce. At the time of the construction of the dam, some of them have got jobs available in the dam site, which were unskilled, dangerous as well as least paid. After the completion of that project, all such jobs ended. This is a very rare instance of multiple exploitations wherein they lost their traditional land, traditional occupations and finally they lost the jobs related to the construction of the dam also. The types of land and landholding are important in the life and culture of the Wayanad Kadars.

The loss of agricultural land has made extreme impact on their economy and traditional occupations. The loss of agricultural land is a push factor from land-based jobs, which had opposite effects on the employment status of the displaced people. Hence the natural capital is being appropriated by the privileged, leading to the impoverishment of vast human masses who largely depend on natural resources.

The families of three areas are mainly affected by the displacement, which includes Kodumchola, Vengakolly and Chellad. Altogether about 100 families have lost their lands and homes. Acres of farmlands, including dry and wet lands, were drowned and four sacred places (*thadanga*), where their ancestors are worshipped also drowned when the water stored in the dam. The submerged areas inside the dam is provided in the Table 2 and it shows that the 102 Wayanad Kadar families were evicted with the construction of the dam.

Table 2: Submerged areas inside the dam

Villages	Wet land in acres	Dry land	Sacred places	Number of families evicted
Chellad	60	100	2	26
Kodumchola	20	70	2	57
Vengakolly	10	20	1	19
Total	90	190	5	102

The traditional lifestyle of the Wayanad Kadars have been subjected to change by the im-

pect of outside influence. The ethnic identities of the Wayanad Kadars are no longer enduring. Loss of agricultural land, different administrative restraints against the freedom of enjoying the forest, etc., forced them to change their traditional rituals and practices related to hunting and cultivation. Though they are experts in the use of bow and arrows, they have stopped hunting because of the ban on hunting. Due to the frequent interactions with the people on plains, their food pattern and dressing pattern have also changed. The Wayanad Kadars are now looking back and trying to recollect their traditional way of life. Most of them are not getting community certificates and only because of that they are trying to preserve tribal identities and that has become a survival problem for them today.

Before displacement, the Wayanad Kadars had common property resources equally shared with mutual consent and cooperation. Due to development induced displacement, their resettlement is leaving them with meagre resources in an unknown ecology. The displaced Wayanad Kadars were scattered and resettled themselves in different Panchayats in Wayanad District. At present, the displaced Kadar families have land holding ranging from 10-20 cents to 2-3 acres.

Land Holdings

At present, the majority of households, that is twenty percent, have 10 cents of land. The Table 3 provides the details of the present land holdings of the Wayanad Kadars. The fourteen percent households have 30 cents. The sixteen percent households have 30 cents. The sixteen

Table 3: Land holdings after displacement

S. No.	Land in cents	Number of households	Per-cent	Cumulative %
1	10	20	20	20
2	20	14	14	34
3	25	16	16	50
4	30	14	14	64
5	50	12	12	76
6	60	10	10	86
7	65	2	2	88
8	100	6	6	94
9	Above 100	6	6	100
Total		100	100	

percent households have 25 cents. The twelve percent households have 50 cents. Only two percent households have 65 cents of land and six percent households have 100 cents of land. Only six percent households have above one acre land.

The lands were purchased by the tribal households from the amount of the cash compensation received at the time of evacuating them from their original habitats for the construction of the Banasura Sagar Dam in 1979. With the shifting of their traditional settlements, their traditional occupational structure has also changed. The present status of occupations is also studied.

Occupational Status

At present, 79.26 percent of the working population are wage labourers and 9.75 percent are Government employees. Only 2.43 percent are professionals. The 8.53 percent are engaged in occupations like carpentry (1.21%), welding (1.21%), and driving (2.43%). Besides these primary occupations, most of them are engaged in secondary occupations like animal husbandry, which is mostly confined to poultry farming, goat rearing, etc., and their marginal farming includes the cultivation of pepper and coffee. The present occupational status is provided in Table 4.

The present occupational status shows that the Wayanad Kadars, a traditional paddy cultivating tribal group have become wage labourers. They are not practicing agriculture as they were evacuated from their original habitat for the construction of the Banasura Sagar Dam in 1979. Although, they have received cash compensation, they could not procure cultivable land and moreover, they have scattered to various places of Wayanad in search of land for purchasing. They were not rehabilitated to proper places. They received compensation according to the Land Acquisition Act. According to it, a person whose land or other means of livelihood are destroyed in the process of displacement, they are entitled to get just cash compensation. It means that the land, natural resources, means of livelihood, social and cultural loss resulting from displacement can be quantified and compensated in monetary terms.

Table 4: Occupational status

S. No.	Occupation	Male	Female	Total	Percent
1	Agriculture	0	0	0	0
2	Wage labourer	80	50	130	79.26
3	Teaching	0	2	2	1.21
4	Nursing	0	2	2	1.21
5	Government service	12	4	16	9.75
5	Welding	4	0	4	2.43
6	Contract work	2	0	2	1.21
7	Driving	4	0	4	2.43
8	Sales representative	2	0	2	1.21
9	Carpentry	2	0	2	1.21
	Total	106	58	164	100

In the case of Wayanad Kadar, they are facing the problems of sustainability along with landlessness, homelessness and joblessness. The culture of Wayanad Kadar developed from traditional habitat, which reveals the traditional livelihood patterns of hunting, gathering, fishing, etc. The displacement has resulted in the changes of livelihood pattern from natural capital to human capital. Hence, the issue of landlessness, becomes critical to the community like Wayanad Kadar. The displacement is a life-threatening issue and in this perspective, the Government was evacuating an indigenous community from their original habitat. The indigenous knowledge of the Wayanad Kadar does not work in the present situation, where their livelihood is completely different from the previous one. The Wayanad Kadars displaced during 1980s are struggling for their survival and these deviations force them to depend more on alternatives than the natural resources. The Wayanad Kadars had never experienced earning their livelihood through daily wages as they had more than enough land to sustain their families for generations. Now, they have only daily wages as the major source to sustain their families. At present, animal husbandry is the secondary occupation for the majority.

The multidimensional impact of the loss of agricultural land of these people have created problems like disintegration of kinship ties, marginalisation through the fragmentation of joint families, and loss of domestic and agricultural related rituals. The land acquisition does

not lead to landlessness and household level food insecurity but also triggered faster fragmentation of joint families, which is reflected in other parts of life.

The non-quantifiable nature of numerous human and ecological costs has not even been acknowledged. The Government documents recognise the problem associated with cash compensation, particularly, in the case of tribal people. The Wayanad Kadar people have been living in a particular region for centuries. The way of life of the people destroyed cannot be rebuilt in the original form in the newly settled areas. This is a great sacrifice on the part of tribal people for national development. The main issue has to be addressed is how to achieve rehabilitation. The socio-cultural economic and ecological rehabilitation can give a sense of original form of life. The displacement of the people due to dam has been involved in violation of their basic human rights including the very right to life. The claim of development becomes meaningless for the Wayanad Kadars who have lost their identity. The cultural processes include economic, ecological, religious and political status, which was helping people to transform their environment and also ensure their existence. It also helped them to transmit their culture for generations.

At present, the dam project has displaced the indigenous tribal community, the Wayanad Kadar, and they were forced to migrate to forests for their survival. It led to drastic changes in their socio-economic and cultural life. The life supporting system of the Wayanad Kadars, the common property resources like dry lands and wet lands have taken away from them by the dam project. They were forced to displace and scattered all over Wayanad District. The compensation given was also inappropriate and they need more care and support in their livelihood. Therefore, the need of relocation with all the livelihood facilities is yet to happen in the case of the displacement of the Wayanad Kadars.

CONCLUSION

The Wayanad Kadars, an erstwhile shifting cultivators and agriculturists, have been displaced from their original settlement areas and their farm lands due to the construction of the Banasura Sager Dam. They are displaced to various places of Wayanad District. At present, they

are facing a lot of problems as they are scattered to various places in Wayanad District. The community life of the Wayanad Kadar tribes have been lost considerably. Their social life has critically crumbled down with the changes in their traditional economy, political system, system of values, material culture, relationship with environment, religion and even the overall tribal life. At present, the majority of the Wayanad Kadars have become mere wage labourers. The new generation does not know the methods of cultivation and they also do not maintain their identity. Nevertheless, some of the members have received Government jobs, which is an impact of the acculturation and culture contact with the other communities in the new surroundings of the Wayanad Kadars. In spite of the fact that the old generation have more resentments and miseries appertains to their displacement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be measures to allot cultivable land to those landless and jobless members as well as families. Alternative job opportunities may also be created to sustain self-sufficiency. Initiatives may be taken to construct houses for the displaced people. Those who have settled in forest areas may be rehabilitated to inhabitable areas, especially to the areas in which their relatives are settled. Special attention may be given to those who are facing psychological problems after displacement. Opportunities may be provided to gather all the community members to maintain their customs and traditions, which in turn help to preserve their ethnic identity. Steps may be taken to make available the educational, health, and infrastructural facilities for the displaced families of the Wayanad Kadars.

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