

## A STUDY OF LAND ALIENATION AND INDEBTEDNESS AMONG IRULA TRIBES IN KERALA

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### **Abstract**

*Land alienation and indebtedness are serious problem faced by the Irula tribes in Kerala. Land is the mainstay of them, the main causes of land alienation and indebtedness among the tribal are poor economic condition, drinking habits, urbanisation, and industrialisation, lack of land records, administrative inefficiency, a delays in getting judgement, oral mortgage of lands in the hands of non-tribal, non-possession of judgement, interest- not shown, fear from police and court and money lenders activity in the scheduled area and lack of alternative sources of credit. The problem of tribal indebtedness often gets aggravated and compounded with the Government subsidy-cum loan schemes which further lead the tribal into deep indebtedness*

**Key words:** *Land Alienation, Indebtedness, Reduce Land Alienation and indebtedness.*

### **Introduction**

The tribal unrest is certainly a sophisticated issue to discuss today. Marginalization, landlessness, alienation of land, and displacement are the root causes of their unrest. The state and established political parties have been continuously avoiding assimilating the tribal unrest in the mainstream. In this context, to express their plight in front of public and the government, the tribals have started to seek the help of mobilizations and movements to collect their people to fight against marginalization and landlessness and to articulate their will to assimilate within the mainstream. Alienation of land is a serious problem faced by the scheduled tribes. Land is the mainstay of the tribals and more than 90 per cent of them are dependent on agriculture and allied activities. Hence, land is the only tangible asset of a tribal community, and they are emotionally attached to it.

The problem of indebtedness among the tribal is not an indication of their poverty but also reflects the wider economic malaise, i.e., lack of education, low purchasing bargaining power and lack of resources for engaging in gainful activity and meeting emergent expenditure. Therefore, the problem continues to persist with increasing menace as the indebtedness pushes the tribal further into extreme conditions of poverty and forces them to dispense with their meagre resources, including the small bits and pieces of land to pay off the loans at exorbitant rates of interest. The initiation of commercial vending of liquor in tribal area has started impoverishing the tribal population, making them victims of indebtedness and exploitation.

### Review of Literature

**Mahapatro (1987)** conducted an empirical investigation of 373 tribal households in Korapul District of Orissa. In this study reveals that the sources, purposes and extent of indebtedness among the sample households. He conducted that the problem of tribal indebtedness was a product of primitive existence, social extravagance and market inadequacy. In spite of expansion of co-operative, the money lenders constitute an important source of borrowing in the area under study.

**Mahabilesh Raj (1989)** a study on planning for tribal welfare, They opined that there was a greater disparity in the economic standards of tribal's living in the area of there as mainly over the per-capita income, productivity of agriculture, receptivity of modern techniques ,size of land holding, etc. In some tribal regions, unemployment was quite serious. The major problems experienced by the tribal's were exploited by middlemen, procurement of minor forest produce by commercial forces, money lending, land alienation, indebtedness bondage and forest policies. These were mainly due to their illiteracy, ignorance and also isolation from the non-tribal.

**Shanmugam .P (2011)** have analyzed that the land alienation and poverty in Tamilnadu. This study collected primary data from the tribes of eight selected villages in the district of Nilgiris and Salem in the state of Tamilnadu .Tribes income exclusively depends upon the size of the land holding .Hence ,any loss of land not only reduce their income but also increase their poverty level. Tribes have lost their land in two ways. The first one is compulsorily or forcibly, due to heavy indebtedness and the second one is voluntary, to occupy better positions elsewhere. However, the forms of land alienation also determine the level of poverty. This analysis revealed that the portion of the households in BPL category was lower than that of the proportion in the APL category. But the promotion of BPL households was 12 times higher in Salem (38%) when compare to Nilgiris (3%).It is observed from the survey that in the Nilgiris district, Value of land was higher than that of Selam district. The relationship between poverty and extent of land alienation is analyzed .In general level of poverty and land alienation is positively correlated. At the same time the extent of poverty depends upon the size of land holding of the tribes before alienation. This study found that the major reasons for higher poverty in Salem are the permanent alienation, which has occurs and poor value barren lands.

**Saxena (2012)** have pointed out that the acquisition of land by Government have lately drawn resistance in many cases due to inadequate compensation for the land and loss of livelihoods of affected people as well as for involuntary displacement without proper rehabilitation. The present land acquisition law has been quite hostile to the interest of the land owners, as it attempts to make land available to industry through Government at a minimal price. The most state Governments has been to coerce people to give up their land by using the legal power of eminent domain and in some cases even through the use of force. Some estimates suggest that at least 60 million people were displaced between 1947

and 2004, amongst whom at least 40 per cent were tribal and 20 per cent schedule castes of those displaced. Less than 18 per cent were resettled. This study found that the thousands of families displaced by various projects are still awaiting compensation payments. The land would be acquired by Government for private companies and PPP projects only when at least 80 per cent of the project affected people have given their written consent.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The economic conditions of the tribes today are not much improved. The number of landless tribals has increased during the last decade and several reasons can be attributed to this phenomenon. Scheduled tribes largely depend upon non-tribals to meet their credit requirements. The socio-economic survey of tribals, reveals that tribals alienate their lands mainly for meeting their domestic expenses and for clearing their past debts. The main causes of land alienation and landlessness among the tribals are Poor economic conditions, drinking habit, indebtedness, urbanization, industrialization, lack of land records, administrative inefficiency, delay in getting judgement, oral mortgage of lands in the hands of non-tribal, non-possession of judgement, interest not shown by tribal pleaders or not taking interest due to heavy bribe, fear from Police and court establishing marriage with tribal women and Share cropping. Land alienation has given birth to several allied problems among the tribal, ie; increased poverty among the tribal, decreased the occasion of employment, migration of tribal, exploitation of tribal labourers, exploitation of tribal women, created tension between tribal and non-tribal, increased the distance between the rich and the poor tribals, developed extremism and naxalism in tribal areas, brought law and order problem in tribal areas, directly or indirectly and brought the incidence of beggary and prostitution in the tribal areas.

### **Objective of the Study**

To examine the land alienation and indebtedness among the Irula tribes in Kerala.

### **Methodology**

The present study is based exclusively on primary data. The data has been gathered from 142 households of Sholayur, Agali and Kottathara villages of Attappady block of Palakkad district of Kerala. A stratified random sampling technique has been employed to select households.

In the first stage, the districts were identified on the basis of concentration of primitive and scheduled tribe population. The most Irula populated block of Palakkad district has been selected. Where the total tribal population is around 29,000.

In the final stage the households have been selected proportionately. In view of the population size 10 per cent of the Irula households have been selected from each village.

Based on that Sholayur (41 households), Agali (30households) and Kottathara(71 households) have selected for the present survey. Thus the total sample size is 142.

### Statistical Tools

To analyse on the land alienation and indebtedness of Irula tribes in Palakkad district, the collected data were tabulated and analysed with simple percentage.

### Results and Discussion

**Table 1: Selection of Sample Respondent Village wise**

SI.No	Village Name	No Irula Respondents	Percent
1	Sholayur	41	29
2	Agali	30	21
3	Kottathara	71	50
	Total	142	100

*Source: Primary Data*

*Note: Figure in Parentheses are percentages to the total*

Selection of sample respondent is presented in the table1. In this given data shows that the 50 per cent of the respondents from the Kottathara village and 29 per cent from the Sholayur village and remained 21 per cent from Agali village. These samples are selected on the basis of simple random.

**Table 2: Extent of Land Alienation**

SI.No	Particular	Sholayur	Agali	Kottathara	Total
1	Government Agency	40 (36.70)	6 (27.27)	110 (48.46)	156 (43.58)
2	Private company	0 (0.00)	2 (9.09)	41 (18.06)	43 (12.01)
3	Non-Tribe	69 (63.30)	14 (63.64)	76 (33.48)	159 (44.41)
	Total	109 (100.00)	22 (100.00)	227 (100.00)	358 (100.00)

*Source: Primary Data*

*Note: Figure in Parentheses are percentages to the total*

The details of total tribal acres alienated to Government, private and non-tribal by the tribes is given in table 2. In total, 156 acres of the tribal lands have alienated to Government for various purposes.159 acres of the land has alienated to the non-tribe, viz., settlers from outsidedespecially Tamils, Malaiyalis. Private companies acquired about 43 acres of land. In total 358 acres of tribal land has been alienated to various agencies. Among the villages, Kottathara stands first in the extent of land alienation with 227 acres, followed by Sholayur with 109 acre. In Agali village only 22 acres of land has been given to various agencies. Government has the predominant agency in Kottathara while non-tribe was the main agency in Sholayur and Agali village.

**Table 3: Distribution of Extent of Land Alienation (In Acre)**

Sl.No	Particular	Sholayur	Agali	Kottathara	Total
1	Below 5 Acre	16 (64.00)	5 (71.43)	19 (45.24)	40 (54.05)
2	5-10 acre	6 (24.00)	2 (28.57)	20 (47.62)	28 (37.84)
3	Above 10 Acre	3 (12.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (7.14)	6 (8.11)
	Total	25 (100.00)	7 (100.00)	42 (100.00)	74 (100.00)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Figure in Parentheses are percentages to the total

The extent of land alienation is given table.3. The extent of land alienation has been grouped into three categories viz., below 5 acres 5 - 10 acres and above 10 acres. In total 54.05 per cent of the households are alienated their lands to the extent of below 5 acres, followed by 37.84 per cent of the tribe has alienated to the extent of 5 to 10 acres and 8.11 per cent of the tribes have transferred their lands to the extent of above 10 acres. This shows that most of the tribal lost below 10 acres of land in all surveyed villages. It is also states that the tribes in Agali have not alienated their land above 10 acres. In case Kottathara village nearly one half of the respondents have alienated from 5 to 10 acres.

**Table 4: Classification of Debt of the Respondents**

Sl.No	Particular	Sholayur	Agali	Kottathara	Total
1	No debt	8 (19.51)	12 (40.00)	15 (21.13)	35 (24.65)
2	Co-operative Bank	1 (2.44)	2 (6.67)	3 (4.23)	6 (4.23)
3	Friends and Relatives	0 (0.00)	6 (20.00)	5 (7.04)	11 (7.75)
4	Bank	9 (21.95)	10 (33.33)	18 (25.35)	37 (26.06)
5	Pawn Broker	1 (2.44)	4 (13.33)	4 (5.63)	9 (6.34)
6	Money Lenders	14 (34.15)	13 (43.33)	17 (23.94)	44 (30.99)
	Total	41 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	71 (100.00)	142 (100.00)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Figures in Parentheses are percentage to the total

The detail of the debt among the surveyed is shown in table4. The sources of debt has been classified into six categories viz., no debt, Co-operative bank, friends and relatives, Commercial bank, Pawn brokers and moneylenders. In total one fourth of the tribes have not involved in debt .i.e, they have availed any loan from any of the sources mentioned above. However nearly one third of the respondents (30.99%) got debt from moneylenders and no debt followed by banks (26.06%), Friends and relatives (7.5%), Pawn broker (6.34%) and co-operative bank is (4.23%) were not common loan providers to these tribes. Among the three villages Agali (43.33%) got higher debt from moneylenders as compared to other tribes. In Sholayur no respondents got debt from friends and relatives but in Agali 20 per cent of the respondent got debt from friends and relatives.

**Table 5: Distribution of the Debt of the Respondents (In Rs)**

Sl.No	Particular	Sholayur	Agali	Kottathara	Total
1	No debt	8 (19.51)	12 (40.00)	15 (21.13)	35 (24.65)
2	Below 25000	19 (46.34)	12 (40.00)	28 (39.44)	59 (41.55)
3	25000 -50000	9 (21.95)	2 (6.67)	24 (33.80)	35 (24.65)
4	Above 50000	5 (12.20)	4 (13.33)	4 (5.63)	13 (9.15)
	Total	41 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	71 (100.00)	142 (100.00)

*Source: Primary Data*

*Note: Figure in Parentheses are percentages to the total*

The distributions of debt of the surveyed households are given in table 19. The levels of the debt of the surveyed households are grouped into four categories, with interval of Rs.25000 and ranges in between below Rs.25000 to above Rs.50000. In total, 42 per cent of the tribes have debt and 28.17 per cent of the households have debt below Rs. 25000 and 12.68 per cent of the tribes have their debt in between Rs.25000 - Rs.50000 category. Among the villages also the same trend could be seen in about 40 per cent of the tribes in all the villages have their debt at below 25000 level. But still little more than one third of the tribes in Kottathara village have debt in between Rs. 25000 - Rs. 50000 category.

#### **Major Findings of the Study**

- Out of the total families surveyed (142) more than one half of the families have alienated their land.
- As far as the agencies involved in land alienation 27.13 per cent of the tribes have alienated to the Government, followed by the non-tribe (19.01%) and private companies (8.45%).
- As far as the agencies involved in land alienation 27.13 per cent of the tribes have alienated to the Government, followed by the non-tribe (19.01%) and private companies (8.45%).
- The extent of land alienation is severe in Kottathara and Sholayur than Agali.
- More than three fourth of the respondents in all the villages have alienated their dry land. The distribution of the extent of land alienation shows that most of the tribals lost below 10 acres of land in all the villages and most of the land alienation taken place after 2000.
- The study found that in total, one fourth of the tribes have not fallen into the debt i.e., they have availed any loan from any sources. Among the three villages, Agali (43.33%) got higher debt from moneylenders as compared to other villages. In Sholayur no respondents got debt from friends and relatives but in Agali 20 per cent of the respondent got debt from friends and relatives. In total 40 per cent of the tribes in all the villages have their debt at below Rs. 25000. But still little more

than one third of the tribes in Kottathara village have debt in between Rs. 25000 - Rs. 50000 category.

### Conclusion

The problem of land alienation is common among the Irula tribes. Most of them have alienated their lands to Government. Non-tribes also have acquired a large proportion of land from these tribes.. The severity of land alienation is much high in Kottathara and Sholayur than Agali village. As most of the tribes are illiterates, they were unable to approach court for justice. Hence specific attention should be made to arrest land alienation among the tribes. The active participation and co-operations of the government officials, representatives, Non-Government Organisations, legal advisors and social workers and scheduled promoters will help the tribal people to reduce the level of land alienation and indebtedness of Irulatribes inAttappady block of Kerala.

### Suggestions

- The tribal people are generally illiterate and ignorant so the provisions and regulations implemented by the government have not been reached the tribes, so efforts should be made to educate and enlighten them to arrest the problem of land alienation and indebtedness.
- State Government should implement legislation or issue an ordinance abolishing all debts of tribal people owed to non-tribal people, and also regulating the private money lending in tribal areas and provide alternative credit facilities.
- To provide good basic facilities like house, water, electricity, education, health care and transport facilities and also provide markets to sell their minor forest produces these will help the tribes to reduce the land alienation and indebtedness.

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