

## **The Proposed Project in Athirappilly and the Kadar Tribe**

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**Abstract:** In Kerala a hydro electric project is proposed in the vicinity of the Athirappilly waterfalls. Athirappilly is a Panchayath in Chalakudy Taluk of Thrissur district. The proposed project has direct and indirect impact on the socio economic life of the people of Athirappilly. The primitive tribes like Malayas, Mala Malasars, Mannans and Kadar live in the project area and the most affected tribes are the Kadar tribe. The literacy rate, employment pattern, income and the general appreciation of the project is analyzed in the article. The literacy rate of the Kadar tribe is only 27 per cent. The income of this community is low that 50 per cent of them have income below Rs .5000 per month. The drop out of students from different schools is 48 per cent. The government of Kerala has to take immediate initiative to rehabilitate them to a suitable surrounding.

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### **I. Introduction**

The Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB), proposed a hydro-electric dam across the Chalakudy River in Thrissur district, Kerala, to generate 163 MW of power to meet the deficit during the peak hours from 6 pm to 10 pm. The proposed Athirappilly hydroelectric project (hereafter, HEP) is poised to get a fillip; with the State Government deciding to go ahead with the project since environmental clearances from the Central Government is sanctioned recently. The concrete gravity of dam is envisaged to be 23 m in height and 311 m in length. The water spread area would be 104 hectre whereas the total forest area required would be 138 hectare. Water from the dam will be brought through a 4.69 km tunnel of 6.4 m diameter to the main power house situated north-west of the dam site and above Kannankuzhithodu into which the tail race water will be emptied. These discharges through the Kannankuzhithodu will join the Chalakudy River at a distance of 1.5 km. Two penstocks each of 3.4 diameter and 50 m length will be provided to the power house with an installed capacity of 2 x 80 MW. Apart from these two dams ,two generators with 1.5 MW capacity each are planned 50 m down the dam, thus making the total installed capacity to163 MW(Gadgil Report). In this paper it is envisaged to make an analysis of the socio-economic problems including the threat of shifting the dwellings of the Kadar tribe from the vicinity of the forest and the Athirappilly waterfalls due to the arrival of HEP. There are four major tribal communities namely Malayas, Mala Malasars, Mannans and Kadar living in the surrounding area of the project but the most affected ones are the Kadar. . The hydro electric and irrigation projects, namely; Parambikulam/Aliyar, Peringalkuthu, Sholayar, Pothundi, Mangalam and Thunakadavu had forced them to abandon their habitats and move to resettlement areas which had a direct impact on their social life and economy.

### **II. Background of the project proposal**

The Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, gave environmental clearance on 20.1.1998 and forest clearances to the Athirappilly Project on 22.12.1997 (Stage I - Forest Clearance) and on 16.12.1999 Stage II Forest Clearance).The honourable High Court of Kerala suspended the above sanction on three Public Interest Litigations(PILs), based on the irregularities in the procedure followed for tendering and against the clearance of the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) which was in violation of the Environmental Protection Act. The High Court further asked the KSEB to re-examine the procedure and directed the Central Government to withdraw the sanction given earlier and conduct a public hearing in accordance with the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notification of the MoEF (1994) and the amendment to it dated 10.4.1997 (Kerala High Court judgment dated 17.10.2001) and then reconsider the grant of Environmental Clearance. Accordingly, a public hearing was conducted by the Kerala State Pollution Control Board on 6.2.2002 at Thrissur. The arguments against the reliability of the EIA conducted by the Tropical Botanical Gardens and Research Institute (TBGRI) in 1996, the impact on environment and biodiversity and, the technical feasibility of the project based on the actual availability of water were raised by the gathering. Considering all these, the Public Hearing Panel asked for a second EIA which should be comprehensive and should include Chalakudy River Protection Council on various grounds: its period of study, consultations with various agencies (local bodies, various departments of the government and the local communities) suggested by the High Court, methodology, and scientific reliability were to be dealt with in detail. The KSBB (Kerala State

Biodiversity Board) in an affidavit filed in the High Court of Kerala categorically stated that the EIA report was not comprehensive, and that the methods followed for the biodiversity studies were wrong and unacceptable. Another PIL was filed by the Athirappilly Gram Panchayat and the Kadar tribe, the actual potential sufferers of the proposed dam, challenging the sanction accorded, mainly on the ground that the report of the second EIA was not circulated and kept away from the public and that there was no public hearing on the second EIA. According to the written submission made by CPSS (Chalaky Puzha Samrakshana Samithi) more than 1200 people attended the Public Hearing where none spoke in favour of the project and, in the 252 written representations submitted to the Public Hearing Panel, the ratio for and against the project was 1:9. Pressure from civil society mounted up again, against the project. PILs were filed again by Ms. Geetha, representative of the Primitive Kadar Tribe, challenging the project on the ground of ecology and biodiversity and the impact on their life-support system. To sum up, the KSEB on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2015 filed an affidavit to go ahead with the Athirappilly Project. The Ministry of Environment and Forest sanctioned the final 'No Objection Certificate' on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2015 to the KSEB to go ahead with the Project. This research piece is intended to analyse exclusively the socio economic problems of the Kadar tribe living in the project area due to the arrival of Athirappilly hydro electric dam.

### III. Methodology

Both primary and secondary data is used for the present study. The secondary data is collected from the annual reports of the Forest department of Kerala, the handbooks of Athirappilly Panchayath and the relevant journals. The present study focuses on the Kadar tribe and their socio economic problems due to the emergence of a hydro-electric dam in Athirappilly. A stretch of 28.5 hectares of riparian forest falls under the submergence area of the hydro electric project. The survey is mainly done on the two settlements of the Kadar tribe comprising 80 families who are worse affected by the project. Ward numbers six and eight of Athirappilly Panchayath has about 80 Kadar families living in the proposed dam site and 22 families have their dwellings in less than 400 meter from the proposed dam site and 58 families are in the surrounding area of the dam .These eighty families of potential sufferers were interviewed using a semi- structured interview schedule. The eighty families have 320 members in total. The authors stayed in weekends of seven weeks in Athirappilly Panchayath, (Ward number eight) to get the necessary information. The interview schedules were administered in a cordial and friendly atmosphere and the Kadar tribe was very co-operative. **Unnikrishnan** a twenty year old student of P M Government College Chalaky, who belongs to this tribe, supported the survey and arranged quarters for the accommodation of the authors. The information gathered through the primary survey was analyzed to prepare the article.

### IV. Objective of the study

1 To find out the socio economic problems faced by the Kadar tribe due to the arrival of the proposed dam in Athirappilly.

### V. Kadar tribe in Kerala

Kadar tribe is one of the thirty two tribal aborigines in Kerala. They belong to the primitive tribal groups and used to live in huts made of mud, wooden poles, bamboo and leaves. The government of Kerala has taken initiatives under different schemes to provide them with houses and quarters. Kadar speaks a form of Tamil with Malayalam elements. The hereditary headman of the settlement is called 'Mooppan' who deal with the social control mechanism of the community. They subsist mainly on non timber forest produce collection and forest labour. Traditionally they were expert food gatherers, hunters and trappers. They were adept in making strong ropes required for their honey collection and elephant capturing expeditions. The total population of the Kadar tribe in Kerala is 2736 (Report, DFO 2015). The Kadar is found in Thrissur, Palakad and Kozhikode districts of Kerala state. Table 1.1 explains the total number of the Kadar tribe in Kerala.

**Table 1.1 Kadar Tribe in Kerala**

Sl no	place	families	male	female	total	Per cent
1	Thrissur	90	904	940	1844	67.39
2	Palakad	207	386	380	766	27.99
3	Kozhikode	32	70	56	126	4.62
	Total	545	1360	1007	2736	100

Source: Report Kerala Forest Division, 2015(unpublished data)

Highest number of Kadar tribe is found in the district of Thrissur in Kerala. It is observed during the primary survey that the community is comfortable in Athirappilly and finds job opportunities and education facility for their younger generation. The Sex ratio (total) is found to be 1007:1360 which is very

much less as compared to the general sex ratio of the state of Kerala (1084: 1000, census 2011 ).It is also clear from table 1.1 that the size of the family is more in Thrissur district as compared to the other two districts.

## VI. Result and Discussions

The Kadar tribe in Athirappilly faces different socio economic problems and challenges and the emergence of the HEP mounts them. The discussion of the present study is arranged in the order of (a) literacy (b) employment (c) income and (d) the general appreciation of the project. A short description is also included about their customs and peculiar traditions which are unique for this tribe.

### 6.1 Literacy Rate

In the primary survey conducted, it is revealed that the literacy rate of the Kadar tribe is only 27 per cent which is much lower than state average of 93.91(census, 2011).They have to go a long way to attain the state average. In table 1.2 the literacy rate of the Kadar tribe is portrayed.

**Table 1.2 Literacy Rate**

General particulars	The members of the families.	Per cent
Those who can read and write Malayalam.	48	15
Those who can read and write both Malayalam and English.	38	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>27</b>
Those who cannot read and write both Malayalam and English.	234	73
Total	<b>320</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: primary survey

The Kadar tribe in Athirappilly is yet to bring their first generation educated out. We have also made an estimation of the drop out of Kadar students from the enrolment list of various schools. This comes up to 48 per cent. Kerala takes pride in the first rank among all the states of India in literacy; it has to take special care to improve the literacy of the tribes. If they are shifted from their present dwellings, it is going to affect their literacy level and it will fall further. It is to be noted that 73 per cent of them cannot even read and write Malayalam, the language of the state. Their mother tongue is a mix of Tamil with Malayalam elements.

### 6.2 Employment of the Kadar Tribe.

The Kadars are primitive tribes and were engaged in Collection of honey, bamboo and other non timber forest gatherings and fishing. The Vazhachal and Athirappilly stretch of the Chalakudy River has the highest fish density and diversity in the state. The project area also falls under the habitat of the rarest and highly endangered Cochin Forest Cane turtle (*Heosemys silvatica*). The National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources in Lucknow has recommended this stretch as a fish sanctuary. (Report, Chalakudy River based research Centre, 2007). ). The Vazhachal forest division is the second most biodiversity area in the state (Kerala Bio Diversity Board, 2007).The life style of the Kadars mainly depends upon finding a living from the surrounding forest area. It is to be noted that they catch fish just for their survival and maintains the balance and sustainability of the environment. This balance will be disturbed if the HEP enters the scene. The employment pattern is given in table 1.3.

**Table 1.3 Employment Pattern of the Kadar Tribe in Athirappilly**

Sl no.	Type of employment	Number of families	Per cent
1	Casual labour(seasonal, daily wages)	12	15
2	Daily wage earning employment under NREGP	12	15
3	Watch men under VSS	12	15
4	Casual Labour offered by VSS	15	18.75
5	Collection of honey, bamboo, firewood and other Forest gatherings.	20	25
6	Fishing	7	8.75
7	Permanent employment in Government sector.	2	2.5
8	Total	80	100

Source: Primary survey

From table 1.3 it is vivid that major portion of the Kadar tribe in Athirappilly (25 %) is engaged in collection of honey and other traditional labour. This reveals that their life support system is their surroundings. Any diversion from it will be a disaster for them. The youth of the community are engaged in daily wage labour as it is offered to them by the Vana Samrashana Samithy (VSS).The VSS gives them daily wage employment opportunities.

### 6.3 Income of the Kadar Tribe

The income of a family or an individual is a clear indication of their economic status. The income of the Kadar tribe is presented in table 1.4. As per table 1.4, 50 per cent of them have an income below five thousand rupees. The economic status of the Kadar tribe is very pathetic. Only the government employed persons have an income above Rs 20,000. The government and the voluntary associations have to come forward to help them to come out of their present situations.

**Table 1.4 Income of the Kadar Tribe**

Income	Number of families	Per cent
0-5000	40	50
5000-10000	28	35
10000-20000	10	12.5
20,000 and above.	2	2.5
TOTAL	80	100

Source: Primary survey

As is seen from table 1.4, it is very clear that the income of the Kadar tribe is low and of course their food pattern is different from the rest of the people in Kerala. There is deficiency of nutritional food intake. They spend fewer amounts on food and there is widespread use of alcohol. If they are to be brought up to the status of the ordinary people of Kerala, opportunities should be created for better education, employment and income generation. With this backdrop if they are demanded to shatter away from their natural habitat, it is going to be a great harm to this tribal community. Unless they are rehabilitated in a similar surrounding, the education of the younger ones, employment and their existence itself will be in chaos.

### 6.4 General Appreciation of the Project among the Kadar tribe

We have also made an analysis on the general acceptance of the project among the Kadar tribe in Athirappilly. Table 1.5 gives us an idea of the same.

**Table 1.5 General Appreciation of the project**

Acceptance of the project	Number of persons	
		per cent
Kadar tribe who favour the project.	4	1.25
Kadar tribe who do not favour the project	316	98.75
Total	320	100

Source: survey data

Table 1.5 speaks the mind of the people of the Kadar tribe. Only four people spoke in favour of the project and that too with indifference. It is to be remembered that they are people of the forest and no one can deprive them their rights. It is observed that the Kadar tribe in Athirappilly is in fear and tension that they will lose their natural habitat and the means of livelihood.

## VII. Conclusion

The present study focused on the socio economic problems of the Kadar tribe who are the potential sufferers of the arrival of the hydro electric project at Athirappilly Panchayath of Thrissur district in Kerala. They have shifted their dwellings and sacrificed their natural habitat due to the emergence of the projects like Parambikulam/Aliyar, Peringalkuthu, Sholayar, Pothundi, Mangalam and Thunakadavu in Kerala. As per the study the literacy rate of the Kadar tribe is only 27 per cent which is much lower than the state average. The employment pattern and income are clear indicators of their economic backwardness and requires immediate government interference and social support to uplift them. Before implementing the project the government of Kerala should take sufficient precaution as to rehabilitate them in accordance with their cultural upbringing and social re-orientation to bring them to the mainstream.

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