

## ABSTRACT

### FORESTS, RIVER VALLEY PROJECTS AND DISPLACEMENT

#### **A PILOT STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF DISPLACEMENT BY THE PEPPARA DAM ON THE KANI TRIBAL FAMILIES IN THE VITHURA PANCHAYAT OF THE THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DISTRICT**

Development induced displacements of human communities is one of the major social disruptive processes happening all over the world. Among the various impacts of large developmental projects, the displacement by large river valley projects in forested and tribal areas is an exceptionally devastating one. The studies of the International Commission on Large Dams and the World Commission on Dams calculate that at least 40 – 80 million people have been directly displaced by large dams all over the world. India which has 4200 dams completed since Independence has the distinction of having 30 – 50 million dam displaced people. The majority of them have not been resettled or given any compensation. In Kerala, there are 60 large dams built for irrigation and power generation, but no documentation of the people displaced or the measures taken to resettle them had been done.

The objectives of the present enquiry are :

- To study the impact of displacement on the life of the Kani tribal population by the Peppara dam in the Karamana basin and
- To monitor the impact of the dam and subsequent developmental activities on the forest resource base of the Kanis and their basic survival and subsistence activities.

The Peppara dam on the Karamana River was commissioned in 1984 for the augmentation of the Aruvikkara reservoir that provides drinking water to the Thiruvananthapuram city and suburbs. Along with the construction of the dam, the whole catchment area of the dam was declared as a Wildlife Sanctuary with an area of 53 sq.km. Most of the surrounding forests were clear-felled and converted to monocultural plantations of eucalyptus, acacia and albizzia severely curtailing the forest resource availability of the Kanis.

Ten Kani villages were totally or partially submerged by the Peppara reservoir with an area of 5.82sq.km. Seven villages near the reservoir have also been adversely affected by the submergence of the forested river valleys and consequent development measures. 44 Kani families were forcefully displaced by the dam. They were promised 2.5 ha of land of their choice and up to Rs.12,000/- as cash compensation for the houses and crops they lost. The Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) was supposed to acquire 110ha of forest area from the Kerala Forest Department (KFD) and create a model resettlement colony with housing, drinking water facilities and subsidies for agricultural, economic and social rehabilitation of the people.

But two years after the displacement, the PHED managed to obtain about 50ha of land in Podiyakkala and built 29 houses for the m. The displaced Kanikkar resettled themselves haphazardly in stages in Chemmankala, Chathancode and Podiyakkala. Right now the displaced Kani families have only small bits of land ranging in extent from 10 – 20 cents to 2 acres. Most of the houses built by the PHED are in a state of bad disrepair.

The displaced Kanikkar have had to face several adverse social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts that affect their productive assets, sources of livelihood, homesteads, cultural identity, families and kinship, social relations, community structure, traditional authority and potential for mutual help that come out of these relationships. Their traditional ecologically viable agriculture has been destroyed and replaced with cash crops like rubber. This has affected their food security and overall self-sufficiency. The degradation of natural forests has reduced the availability of wild edible and commercial produce. The Wildlife Sanctuary has prohibited the Kanis from hunting and collecting in the forest areas.

Impoverishment risks due to displacement and lack of proper resettlement have been identified and discussed in the report. The resettled Kanis, though a homogenous ethnic group, have suffered impoverishment in different ways. Large families, women and elders who resisted displacement have suffered more severe impacts. Children have also been a vulnerable group who have lost educational opportunities not only in terms of formal school education but also in terms of the practical life education of a forest tribal group.

The Eco Development Programme being implemented in the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary has failed to alleviate the sufferings of the dispossessed Kanis. The Tribal Sub Plan that is being implemented today mainly to enhance the food security and to ensure basic survival resources for the tribals has also not benefited them much. The lack of a National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation worsens the condition of the oustees.

From the detailed interviews and group discussions, it is clear that the Kanis are not prepared to come out of their forest milieu, nor are they capable of competing and surviving in the competitive world outside. So it is all the more important that their basic survival needs are assured and their natural resources and livelihoods restored. There has to be programmes and assistance for rejuvenating their agriculture, mainly of food crops so that they will be self sufficient in food. The EDC should be strengthened and redesigned in such a way that the whole hearted participation if every Kani living inside the Wildlife Sanctuary is ensured for forest protection, eco-restoration and rejuvenation of Non Timber Forest Produce for wild edible resources and biomass for sale.

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## **Introduction**

### **Refugees – Dynamics of Displacement**

Millions of people throughout the world have been and continue to be forced out of their lands and homes. Some are uprooted from their land and homes as a result of deliberate government development policies. A much larger proportion move out by the intolerable conditions of insecurity and poverty in the location where they live. The news headlines about the “war on the displaced” in Europe, Central America, South Africa highlight a disturbing global trend – the increasing prevalence of forced movements of people and the emergence of vast numbers of uprooted people, known variously as ‘refugees’, ‘asylum seekers’, ‘displaced persons’, ‘oustees’, ‘expellees’, ‘returnees’, ‘economic migrants’, ‘project affected people’ and so on. Almost all of them suffer severe hardships and they hardly ever get properly rehabilitated.

Forced mass uprooting and migrations of entire communities and populations are nothing new. This has happened throughout history and has contributed to the current human distribution scenario. The slave trade of the 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, religious persecution, colonial expansion, the two World Wars and subsequent realignment, changing environmental conditions, diseases, and political and economic instabilities have all involved mass displacements of people in many parts of the world. The economic and political crisis causing mass movement of people has been intensified by widespread ecological deterioration. Deforestation, desertification, drought and floods have made life even more precarious for millions. In addition to this global phenomenon of mass displacements within and across state boundaries and increasingly between continents, there is also the uprooting of people from their land and life support natural resources by mega development projects such as large scale mining, super dams, extensive logging operations and rapid industrialization. The greater reach of manipulative and exploitative development and the relentless search for resources to sustain the present pace of development are now threatening the last homelands and resources of ordinary people everywhere in the world.

The uprooted people all over the world share a number of common characteristics. The majority of them are economically poor but have lived in ecologically rich areas. Many are members of numerically small minority groups or tribal communities. They are forced to abandon their familiar surroundings and live in alien and often hostile environments. Their new circumstances offer them a narrow range of choices in life and often one kind of displacement leads to another, compounding their vulnerability and misery.

### **Dams and Displacement**

Among the various kinds of developmental projects executed all over the world involving natural resources like water, forest and minerals, large dams across rivers submerging fertile or forested valleys have displaced maximum number of people from their traditional lands and habitat. Over the last six decades, the builders of dams have evicted

from their homes and lands, many tens of millions of people, almost all of them being economically poor and politically powerless. A large proportion of them are from among tribal groups and other ethnic minorities. These legions of dam 'oustees', have in the majority of cases been economically, culturally, emotionally, socially devastated. In many cases the people have been flushed out with only minimum compensation and often none at all was given. Thus many self-sufficient farming families have been reduced to eking out an existence as migrant labourers or have ended up as slum dwellers in distant cities.

These displaced people are only the most visible victims of the proponents, benefactors and builders of large dams. Millions more have lost land and homes to the canals, roads, power lines and land and industrial development which follow dams into the valleys. Many more have not been physically displaced from their homes, but have lost access to clean water, fish, wildlife resources, grazing land, timber fuel wood and wild fruits and other marketable resources in the dammed river and valley. Others downstream have been deprived of the annual flood which once irrigated and fertilized their fields and recharged their wells. Millions too have suffered from diseases that dams and large irrigation projects in the tropics almost inevitably bring in their wake.

### **Dammed Lies and Statistics**

The sheer number of people who have been forced out of their homes by dams is staggering. It is however difficult to give even a reasonably accurate estimate of the total number of people who have been evicted as the industries or the government departments sponsoring developmental activities have rarely bothered to collect reliable statistics regarding oustees. Not surprisingly, given their size, population densities and number of dams, India and China have displaced and are displacing more people than any other nation. Researchers from the Indian Social Institute in New Delhi estimate 'conservatively' that more than 14 million have been displaced by reservoirs and associated river valley projects in post-Independence India (Panjiar, 1993).

The World Bank uses Chinese government figures to estimate that 10.2 million people were displaced by reservoirs in China between 1950 and 1989 (World Bank, 1993). Chinese dam critic Dai Quing however believes that the true figure of Chinese dam oustees is between 40 and 60 million (Dai Quing, 1994).

Data gathered by Patrick Mc Cully (1996) give a total figure of 2.2 million people displaced by 134 completed dams in countries for which information is available, excluding China and India. This is less than 1 percent of the large dams built outside China and India but includes most of those with the largest numbers of evictions. A conservative estimate of worldwide dam evictees taking the Chinese government figure at face value would therefore be around 30 million. A more realistic estimate (using a number for China from the bottom end of Dai Quing's range) would be around 60 million – more than the entire population of the United Kingdom! (Mc Cully, 1996)

World Bank researchers calculated in 1994 that 4-4.5 million are evicted by dams every year, an average of 14,000 people per dam. Multiplying this average by 40,000 (the number of large dams in the world) gives a total of 560 million! (World Bank, 1994). The annual estimate is therefore probably far too high. (Mc Cully, 1996).

A large dam according to the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) is 15 m. or more high from the foundation or between 5-15 metres high and must have a reservoir volume of more than 3 million cubic metres. The World Commission on Dams (WCD) estimates that the world has built more than 45,000 large dams by the year 2000 and have physically displaced “some 40-80 million people worldwide”. According to the WCD, “the negative effects of large dams were frequently neither adequately assessed nor accounted for. The range of these impacts is substantial, including on the lives, livelihoods and health of the affected communities dependent on the riverine environment”. (WCD, 2000)

The WCD also found out that millions of people living downstream from dams – particularly those relying upon natural flood plain function and fisheries – have suffered serious harm to their livelihoods and the future productivity of their resources has been put at risk. Many of the displaced were not recognized or enumerated as such, and therefore were not resettled or compensated. Where compensation was provided, it was often inadequate and where the physically displaced were enumerated, many were not included in resettlement programmes. Those who were resettled rarely had their livelihoods restored. Resettlement programmes have focused on physical relocation rather than the economic and social reanchoring and community development of the displaced.

The data base of the WCD (2000) indicate that indigenous and tribal peoples and vulnerable ethnic minorities have suffered disproportionate levels of displacement and negative impacts on livelihood, culture and spiritual existence. Affected populations living near reservoirs as well as displaced people and downstream communities have often faced adverse health and livelihood outcomes from environmental change and social disruption. Among affected communities, gender gaps have widened and women have frequently borne a disproportionate share of the social costs and were often discriminated against in the sharing of benefits.

### **Dam Displacement – A Few Examples**

Most displacement statistics include only reservoir oustees – yet these are often surpassed by those deprived of land and livelihood by the other components of dam projects or by their long-term ecological effects. These people are rarely defined as “project affected” and as a result are rarely eligible for compensation and also fail to be accounted for in resettlement statistics. Similarly, families who lose part or all of their land but not their houses are often not labelled as “displaced even though the loss of even a small part of a poor household’s land can make the difference between subsistence and starvation. People who farm or graze their livestock in river valley without formal legal rights, as is the case with indigenous people and pastoralists in many parts of the world, seldom

receive compensation for the loss of land. Those who traditionally use the valley for hunting game or collecting wild fruits and vegetables, timber, fodder or firewood are even less likely to be recognized as affected. Families may also end up stranded on newly formed islands or peninsulas, their normal routes to neighbours, schools and markets flooded by the reservoirs. (Mc Cully, 1996)

### **Sardar Sarovar Project – A Case Study**

The many often unrecognized ways in which people can lose their land and livelihood to a huge dam project are well illustrated by the Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat which is part of the colossal Narmada Valley Project.

- 800 families lost their lands to the new township built for the SSP construction workers in 1961. Even after 42 years, they are still fighting for adequate compensation.
- 108 villages will be evacuated for the Wildlife Sanctuary which is going to be established as a symbolic gesture of environmental concern evicting tens of thousands of Adivasis. They are not eligible for any compensation.
- In the name of protecting the reservoir, and for compensatory afforestation, countless thousands will be forced out of their hearths without resettlement.
- Tens of thousands who grow crops, gather fuel wood and fodder, or are employed on the forest and farmland being taken over to resettle the reservoir oustees are suffering what is known as “secondary displacement”.
- An estimated 1,40,000 land owners would lose at least some of their land to SSP’s network of irrigation canals, with 25,000 ending up with less than 2 hectares regarded as the minimum viable holding.
- A large area of farmland, many villages and even whole towns could eventually be flooded by the so-called backwater effect caused by the gradual rise in water levels due to sedimentation in the upper reaches of the reservoir.
- Downstream of the dam, SSP will result in the stoppage of the flow of Narmada river between the dam and sea for most of the year, destroying the livelihoods of thousands of fishing families and boatmen and affecting the water supply of up to a million people.
- Collectively this means that the lives of at least ten lakh people will be drastically affected. Yet according to the government none of them have the right for resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R).
- Even about the formally recognized PAPs, definitive figures are absent. Each year since the first estimates, their numbers are increasing. Tentative estimates are that in Maharashtra 3,500 families, in Gujarat 4,500 families and in Madhya Pradesh 33,014 families will be flooded out of their homes. Their number would be above 2 lakhs!

At the time the World Bank agreed to lend the Indian government \$450 million for SSP in 1985, the official estimate for the total number of families who would need to be compensated was 6,603. In 1996, the latest government estimate of ‘affected’ families was 41,500 to be displaced by the reservoir alone! If one is to add to this figure the

families affected by other aspects of the project, the numbers will rise well into hundreds of thousands. (Mc Cully, 1996; Santhi, 1996)

### **Downstream**

Some of the most serious long-term effects of dams are suffered by the people who live downstream of the dams. In Africa, the loss of the annual flood below dams has devastated traditional flood plain farming, fishing and grazing.

- Kainji Dam in Nigeria directly displaced 44,000 people but adversely affected hundreds of thousands more who had formerly grazed their livestock and grown crops on land irrigated by the annual flood.
- Bakolori Dam on the Sokoto, a tributary of Niger in Nigeria reduced the area of rice grown downstream by 7,000 hectare and that of dry season crops by 5,000 hectare. A survey in the 1980s found that three quarters of the dry season farmers in affected villages had given up farming. (Adams, 1992)
- The Sobradinho Dam, Brazil's World Bank funded dam flooded out some 72,000 people in the mid 1970s, and also the high dry season river levels caused by the dam threatened to flood thousands of hectares of rice fields along the Sao Francisco River. The authorities launched an emergency operation to protect the flood plains by building a series of dykes and pumping stations, converting 25,000 hectare of seasonally flooded land to year round irrigation. These projects also displaced 50,000 sharecroppers and other poor rural people. (Mc Cully, 1996)
- The Tucurui Dam on the Tocantins, a major tributary of Amazon in Brazil displaced 24,000 people, but approximately 40,000 living on hundreds of islands below the dam have had to endure filthy water discharged from the reservoir and the loss of the regular floods. (Magee, 1989)

### **Dams and Tribal People**

Indigenous communities, tribal groups and other marginalized ethnic communities make up a disproportionately large percentage of those who lose their livelihoods to dams. Areas with people who are well off and well connected do not make good reservoir sites. In India according to government estimates, 40 percent of all those who have been displaced by dams are 'adivasis'. They represent less than 6 percent of the Indian population. (Thukral, (ed.), 1992) Almost all the larger schemes built and proposed in the Philippines are in the land of the country's 4.7 million indigenous people. (Mc Cully, 1996)

The majority of the 58,000 people evicted by the Hoa Binh Dam in Vietnam belonged to ethnic groups as would most of the 1,12,000 to be displaced by the even bigger Ta Bu Dam planned further downstream. (Hirsch, 1992)

The impact of dams upon indigenous people is especially harmful as most of these communities have already suffered centuries of exploitation and displacement, and their remote mountain valleys, forests or desert reservations are often their last refuge

protecting them from cultural obliteration. The trauma of displacement is also more crippling for indigenous communities because of their strong spiritual ties to their homeland. Because many of the communal bonds and cultural practices which help define their societies and the common resources on which their economy is based are destroyed by displacement, they are irreversibly affected.

In Brazil, the indigenous people who exist now are the survivors of the earlier phase European colonization. The social disruption caused by dams and the influx of workers and settlers which follows in their wake often deliver the death blow to these tribal communities. The case of the Waimiri-Atroari tribe on the Uatuma tributary of the Amazon is one such. In 1905, it was estimated that the tribe numbered 6,000. Eighty years later, massacres and disease left only 374 of them alive. In 1987, the gates of the Balbina Dam across Uatuma river was closed, flooding two villages in which lived 107 of the remaining members of the tribe and blocking the annual upstream migration of the turtles whose eggs are a staple of their diet.

The Waimiri-Atroari are now threatened by a plan to divert the river, Alalau to increase the flow into the Balbina reservoir. This would have a catastrophic effect upon the remaining Indians, who depend upon the Alalau both physically and culturally especially since the Uatuma was dammed earlier. The final blow to the remaining miniscule population of this tribe will come with the invasion of their land by thousands of workers and heavy machinery during the construction of the dam. Alcohol, prostitutes and violence that always accompany such massive operations will wipe them out in no time (Fearnside, 1989; Gribel, 1990).

Areas populated by indigenous people may seem remote and sparsely inhabited to the planners in the cities. But the strips of riverside farmland and forest which are flooded by dams are usually the best lands in their territory and economically and culturally much more important than it appears from their size.

The U.S. funded Kaptai hydropower dam on the Karnafuli River in the Chittagong hill tracts in south east Bangladesh displaced more than 1,00,000 Chakma ethnic minority people – one sixth of the total Chakma population and flooded around two fifths of their cultivable land. The resulting land shortage and resentment against the government helped spark off the bloody conflict between the Buddhist Chakma tribes and Muslim Bengali settlers which has ravaged the region since Kaptai was completed in 1962. (Oliver-Smith, 1991)

Adverse impact of dams on tribal cultures is not restricted to the third world. One of the least known consequences of water development in the U.S. is its impact on Native Americans. A quarter of the North Dakota reservation of the three Affiliated Tribes (the Mandans, Hidatsas and Arikas) and almost all of the agriculturally productive land was flooded by Garrison Dam. 80 percent of the reservation's population was displaced. The three tribes pressed the government for compensation, including permission to graze their cattle along the margins of the reservoir and first rights to harvest the timber in the submergence zone. Yet even these modest demands were refused (Reisner, 1986).

C.Patrick Morris of the Centre for Native American Studies at Montana State University believes that Garrison and other reservoirs on the Missouri are “major contributors to the 70 – 90 percent unemployment rates on the region’s Indian reservations today. (Morris, 1990)

In the Columbia Basin, the dam builders’ greatest crime against Native Americans has not been the theft of their land or water, but the destruction of the salmon fisheries on which their economy and much of their culture were based (as cited by Mc Cully, 1996).

### **Waiting for the Dam**

The pain of displacement is usually the culmination of years, sometimes decades, of waiting, hearing rumours and receiving threats of impending eviction from developers. As soon as a dam is proposed, the people in the reservoir area begin to suffer the withdrawal of government and private investment. Property prices fall, banks refuse to give loans, and no new schools or health centers are built. Due to lack of upkeep, infrastructure facilities decay. Existing facilities may close long before people move out of the area. By the time resettlement starts, the oustees are often already worse off than people in neighbouring areas.

This problem is worse for dams than other types of projects as their gestation period is so long, the larger projects taking many decades from their first conception to completion. The Three Gorges Project in China was first envisaged in 1919; the first Draft Plan was drawn up in 1944; detailed designs made in 1955; preliminary construction began in 1993; and resettlement is not expected to be completed until the year 2008. (Dai Quing, 1994)

### **A Dam Built With Blood – The Chixoy Massacre**

The most awful human rights atrocity associated with dam evictions was the murder of 378 Maya Achi Indians from the tiny village of Rio Negro in the submergence zone of Guatemala’s Chixoy Dam. The Guatemalan Power Utility encouraged the violence so that their officials could pocket the compensation payments due to the villagers. Culpability for the massacres must also lie with the foreign companies and donors who were happy to design, build and fund a high dam in a country ruled by a military dictatorship with a record of brutality against its own indigenous population. The World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and Italian Government who gave loan for the project all appear to have turned a blind eye to the massacres and to have refused to acknowledge them in project documents. (Mc Cully, 1996)

### **After the Deluge**

The great majority of those displaced by dams have statistically disappeared, swallowed up by the slums and the camps of migrant labourers. In India, perhaps three-quarters of the millions of dam oustees were given no replacement land or housing; at best they

received a small sum of cash compensation. Often they got nothing at all. (Maloney, 1990) And numerous studies show that even those Indian oustees who were “resettled” invariably also ended up impoverished, demoralized and bitter. ‘submerged destitutes’ is the sadly apt name given to the people displaced by Rengali dam in Orissa by their new neighbours at their resettlement sites. (Behura & Nayak, 1993)

In China, according to official statistics, only one third of reservoir oustees have been able to ‘re-establish their lives at satisfactory standards’. Another third reportedly ‘settled into subsistence livelihoods and the rest were mired in poverty’. (World Bank, 1994)

In the rest of the world, for all of the resettlement operations for which reliable information is available, the majority of the oustees have ended up with lower income, less land than before, less work opportunities, inferior housing, less access to the commons for resources such as fuel wood and fodder, and worse off in nutrition and physical and mental health (Mc Cully, 1996).

Where displaced farmers receive cash compensation for lost land, it is invariably far lower than the cost of land if they are to purchase it. Sometimes this is because the value of land is estimated according to out of date tax assessments; sometimes it is because of inflation in the years between surveys of land to be submerged and the actual payments. Land compensation paid may also be insufficient simply because the authorities do not have the money or desire to pay an adequate amount. Land compensation received may also be inadequate because corrupt officials or other middlemen skim off a cut for themselves.

As most dam oustees are farmers, a significant drop in the size of the landholdings can lead to a disastrous drop in income. In 1981, one lakh people living in the submergence zone of Srisaïlam Dam in Andhra Pradesh were driven out of their homes in what was called ‘Operation Demolition’. Three years later a team from the New Delhi based NGO, Lokayan surveyed 258 Srisaïlam oustee households. They concluded that since eviction, the families’ incomes had declined by more than 80 percent, mainly because of the reduction in the area of farmland. Compensation for submerged land had amounted to only one-fifth of its market value. Ownership of livestock and agricultural equipment had fallen drastically and average family debts had risen by more than 150 percent. (Lokayan, 1985)

For people who are not landholders the loss of their job or trade due to displacement means that they lose their sole source of livelihood. New jobs may be available at the dam site but unskilled oustees will invariably get the worst paid and most dangerous work. In any case almost all these jobs are lost once the project is complete. Competition in the local job market is increased because so many formerly self-sufficient farmers are made landless by the dam. The sudden influx of oustees into a resettlement area may also have the effect of lowering wages and reducing job opportunities for the people already living there. This results in conflict between the local community and the resettled people.

## **The Loss of the Commons**

For many rural people, and especially the poorest among them, the submergence of the commons is one of the worst losses due to the reservoir. In the semi arid areas of India, for example, poor villagers collect almost all their firewood, and meet up to four fifths of their grazing needs, from common lands. These losses are never and can never be compensated. A 1994 World Bank internal review of 192 projects it had funded involving resettlement could find only one case in which explicit provisions had been made for compensating common property losses. (World Bank, 1994)

While the planners of the resettlement programme for the Manantali Dam on the Bafing River in Mali realized the need to compensate the 10,000 oustees for lost cropland they failed to recognize that the sustainability of the Malian villagers' agriculture requires a reserve of fallow land at least equal to that on which crops are grown in any given year. The planners defined the local people as 'farmers' and not 'herders' and common lands for grazing livestock was not provided. Farm animals were assumed by the planners as peripheral to the local economy. The importance of women's kitchen gardens and the wild foods that the women gather were similarly overlooked. (Horowitz et al., 1993)

Reducing the size of the landholdings and people's access to the commons brings a large risk that hunger will follow in the wake of eviction – an ironic fact given that most dams are built with the rationale of increasing food production through irrigation. The Bombay based Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) reports that fish and meat have vanished from the diets of the thousands of Sardar Sarovar oustees who moved to resettlement sites between 1986 and 1993 and that “a general shortage of pulses and vegetables has been noted in some resettlement colonies”. In general, says the TISS report, “resettlement has meant a decline in the variety, quantity and quality of food consumed” by the oustees. (Parasuram, 1994)

## **Resettled to Death**

Evidence from numerous dam projects shows that resettlement kills. Sickness and death rates usually increase markedly after displacement, especially among the very young and very old. The main causes of illness are malnutrition, poor hygiene, lack of sanitation at the resettlement sites, and the parasitic as well as water borne diseases which invariably follow large water development projects in the tropics. (Mc Cully, 1996)

In addition, oustees displaced to ecologically different areas are often confronted with new types and strains of diseases to which they have little immunity, or do not know how best to prevent or cure. The psychological stress of displacement also increases their susceptibility to diseases.

Drowning is another cause of death among dam affected people, often because their small river boats are unsafe on the exposed waters of a reservoir. People living on the edge of a reservoir usually have little or no warning of fluctuations in the water level due to dam operation. (World Bank, 1994)

## **Women – The Worst Sufferers**

The hardships of eviction and resettlement are not shared equally. Women are often left worse off than men, as the World Bank's 1994 resettlement review explains. This is because 'compensation payments are usually paid only to the (male) heads of households, converting the collective assets of the family to cash in male hands, and leaving women and children at higher risk of deprivation. (World Bank, 1994)

Women may also be affected disproportionately because of their greater dependence on common property: in many cultures women have the responsibility of getting water and collecting fuel wood, fodder, wild vegetables and other produce from the commons. In Africa, women frequently tend gardens on unregistered land for which they are very unlikely to be compensated.

Enakshi Ganguli Thukral (1992) says that, "because women in India are much less mobile than men, the breakdown of village and social units (because of displacement) affects them much more severely. The fact that she might be leaving relatives and friends behind, or may never again meet her daughter who is married into a village which will not be displaced, is a great cause of concern for the woman..."

Traditional community elders and leaders are often marginalized by displacement as it shows them impotent to protect their community from eviction. They may also be usurped by younger community members with more formal education and better ability to negotiate with government officials. Religious leaders and protectors of sacred sites may also lose their social status when religious ceremonies based on sites now flooded cannot be continued.

One of the most serious long-term problems faced by oustees is indebtedness. Resettlement, by replacing dependence on subsistence economies and the commons by dependence on cash and the market, increases people's vulnerability to debt and reduces their ability to make it through lean years. While indebtedness was virtually unknown in their riverside village of Manibeli, four fifths of the households in the Sardar Sarovar Project resettlement site of Parveta were forced to take out loans in the 8 years after displacement began (Parasuram, 1994). Families who are unable to pay back their loans will eventually have no choice but to sell what little assets they have and ultimately their most important asset, their land.

## **The Failure of Resettlement Policies**

The World Bank's 1980 policy on 'involuntary resettlement' was the first policy stance taken by a major development agency regarding resettlement. This policy has since been updated and improved and used as a model by numerous other international agencies. In its own words, "the fundamental goal of the Bank's policy is to restore the living standards and earning capacities of displaced people – and when possible to improve them". However for the vast majority of dams it has funded, the Bank has no data on the

‘living standards and earning capacities’ of displaced people, before or after resettlement. Moreover an ‘Internal Bankwide Review of Projects Involving Involuntary Resettlement – 1986-1993’ concedes that what evidence is available... “points to unsatisfactory income restoration more frequently than to satisfactory outcomes...” Declining income among affected populations is significant, reaching in some cases as much as 40 percent among populations that were poor even before displacement. (World Bank, 1994).

Of the 192 World Bank funded projects examined for the 1994 Bankwide Review, half had no resettlement plans when they were approved by the Bank’s Board of Executive Directors, a direct violation of the institution’s own policy. Also in violation of the Bank’s policy, 70 percent of the

**Table 1**  
**The Underestimation of Oustee Numbers**

Dam/Project	Country	Original Estimate (Year)	Revised Estimate (Year)	Reference
Ita	Brazil	13,800 (1987)	19,200 (1993)	Cernea & Guggenheim (eds.) 1993
Guavio	Columbia	1,000 (1981)	5,500 (1994)	World Bank 1994
Akosombo	Ghana	62,500 (1956)	84,000 (1965)	Cook Ed. 1994 & NEPA 1979
Andhra Pradesh Irrigation II	India	63,000 (1986)	1,50,000 (1994)	World Bank 1994
Gujarat Medium Irrigation II	India	63,600 (19??)	1,40,370 (1994)	World Bank 1994a
Upper Krishna (Karnataka)	India	20,000 (1978)	2,40,000 (1994)	World Bank 1994 & Cook (ed.) 1994
Sardar Sarovar	India	33,000 (1985)	3,20,000 (1993)	NBA 1994
Upper Indravati	India	8,531 (19??)	16,080 (1994)	World Bank 1994a
Kiambere	Kenya	1,000 (1983)	7,000 (1995)	Cook (ed.) 1994
Bakun	Malaysia	4,300 (1988)	9,430 (1995)	Gov. Malaysia 1996
Funtua	Nigeria	100 (19??)	4,000 (1994)	Cook (ed.) 1994
Tarbela	Pakistan	85,000 (19??)	96,000 (19??)	Ames
Ruzizi II	Zaire/ Rwanda/ Burundi	135 (1984)	15,000 (1994)	World Bank 1994

Source : Mc Cully (1996)

resettlement plans which had been prepared provided only for cash compensation, and not for the replacement of land and other productive assets. (World Bank, 1994). Only 15 percent were therefore in compliance with two of the resettlement policy's most basic provisions.

A recurrent finding of reviews of resettlement operations is that the numbers of people to be displaced are almost always grossly underestimated. Planning documents for the projects examined by the Bankwide Review indicated a total of 1.34 million people to be displaced by all 192 projects combined. When the Bankwide Review assessed current progress on these projects they found that in fact at least 1.965 million people were being evicted (63 percent of them by large dams). World Bank staff and borrower country bureaucrats had failed to note the evictions of 6,25,000 people. (World Bank, 1994)

### **Dams and Displacement in India**

India is one of the leading dam builders in the world. According to the Central Water Commission, India has built 3600 dams that qualify as large dams, 3300 of them built after Independence. 1000 more are under construction. Several industrial and other projects have also been implemented. All these projects have required large chunks of land and displaced huge number of people from their habitat, occupation and social organization.

**Table 2**  
**Displacement and Rehabilitation due to Various Projects in India**

Sl.No:	Types	Number Displaced			Numbers Rehabilitated		Backlog	
		Total	Tribal	Tribal Region	Total	Tribal*	Total	Tribal
1	Mines	2,100	1,415	1,200	525	300	1,579	900
2	Dams	14,000	7,000	5,300	3,500	1,315	10,500	3,945
3	Industries	1,300	300	260	325	65	950	195
4	Wildlife Sanctuaries	600	600	500	150	125	562	375
5	Others	500	200	150	125	40	375	110
Total		18,500	9,515	7,410	4,625	1,850	13,962	5,560
Percentage				40	25	40	75	40.07

\* Based on percentage in tribal region

Sources : Saksena & Sen (1999) ; Fernandes (1989 ; 1997)

Fernandes and Thukral (1989), Fernandes (1997) examines the situation of displacement and rehabilitation during four decades (1951 – 1990) on an all India basis. Categorizing the projects responsible for displacement into mineral resources projects, irrigation and

hydel dam projects, industries, National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries and others (roads, airports, railways etc.) they have examined the extent of rehabilitation and have taken into consideration separately the tribal areas and the tribals. The picture that emerges is rather alarming.

### **Dam-Displacement in India – A Few Case Studies**

The Hirakud Dam, one of the largest in India, executed in the 1950s caused displacement of more than 20,000 people, residing in 249 villages. The Srisaïlam Project, completed in 1983, has displaced a population of over one lakh. Another major irrigation project, Tungabhadra, executed in Karnataka, has affected 90 villages, displacing 55,000 people belonging to about 12,000 families. In Maharashtra about 2,200 villages have been affected due to execution of 233 minor, medium and major projects, displacing more than 1.25 lakh families (Lokrajya, 1986). Similarly, during the first 15 years after Independence, 18 major development projects were started in Bihar, which led to the removal of peasants from their lands totaling over 9,480 ha. (Rao, 1986a). On the other hand industrial projects like Rourkela Steel Plant and Heavy Engineering Corporation, Ranchi have displaced about 15,000 and 13,000 persons respectively and also acquired large chunks of land for various purposes. Further, the proposed National Test Range at Baliapal in Orissa is expected to displace about 70,000 people and is supposed to acquire about 10,000 ha. of productive agricultural land. The Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat, one of the many large dams in the colossal Narmada Valley Project, alone would displace more than ten lakhs of people, most of them small farmers and tribals. All these figures give an idea about the magnitude of displacement caused by large dams.

The debate on how many people have been or are being displaced by dams has raged for many years. A detailed study by the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA, 1988) on the displacement of people by large dams in India, relying on the reports of the Central Water Commission, reveal that the average number of people displaced by a large dam is 44,182. They had studied 58 dams. Roy (1999) has done a cautious calculation of the overall number of dam-displaced people in India. Taking 10,000 as the average number of people displaced by dams and with 3300 large dams built after Independence, her calculation of dam-displaced people in India comes to 33 million!

Though no definitive figures exist, some of the estimates that have become public include those of Fernandes & Thukral (1989), Saksena & Sen (1999) and Roy (1999). Himanshu Thakkar (2000) in his paper on displacement submitted to the World Commission on Dams (WCD) says, “displacement due to dams in India has been variously estimated. Fernandes, Das and Rao (1989) claimed a decade ago that Indians displaced by dam projects numbered 21 million. As the authors themselves pointed out, these were very conservative estimates. A recent statement by N.C.Saxena (the then Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India) however puts the number of large dam oustees of India as 40 million. He said in an open meeting that most of them have not been resettled. According to the Secretary to the Planning Commission, the number of people who have been uprooted by mega development projects in India would be 50

million, of which 40 million would be dam oustees. According to the World Bank (1994a) the number of development refugees in India would be at least 60 million.

The total number of large dams constructed or under construction in India according to CBIP (nd.01) is 4,291. As per the calculation of IIPA (Singh & Banerji (eds.), 2002) in the 213 dams for which information was available, the average area submerged per dam was 8,748 ha. Therefore the total area submerged by the 4,291 dams would come to a whopping 3,75,37,668 ha. Based on this the number of people displaced, using the average of 1.51 persons per ha. would be an astounding 5,66,81,879 (approximately 56 million). This is perhaps an over estimation. However a World Bank study of 11 dams (quoted by CWC, 1992) records that human displacement was a little over 2.6 persons per ha. in India. So the above estimation seems plausible. Given the hesitation of the government to make data available, this is the best estimate that can be made. In any case, what it does establish is that displacement figures cannot be anywhere as low as suggested by some official sources. At best the variation could be of the order of 25 per cent.

These figures cover only the submergence area of the dams, not the canals or other infrastructure. Indications are that the latter often cover a larger area than the former. For example, the proposed Icha Dam will submerge around 8,500 ha. in Orissa. But two canals out of the five emerging from this dam are expected to cover over 61,000 ha. in Orissa and 24,000 ha. in Bihar. This proportion is probably not typical of all projects because in this case (as well as in most other tribal areas) large tracts of land on both sides of the canal are acquired under the Public Purposes Act in the name of the project. In reality most of that land was used for housing for outsiders. Areparambil (1988). Canals, townships, powerhouse sites and other infrastructure that come along with large dams usurp large land areas displacing thousands of families. Unfortunately only those who are directly displaced from the submergence areas are officially considered as 'project affected people'.

And the most tragic part of the whole story is that around 60 percent of these dispossessed people are tribals and dalits. Tribals constitute 8 percent and dalits 15 percent of India's population. Thus India's poorest people subsidize the life style of her affluent citizens. (Roy, 1999). For instance, in the case of Srisailam Project in Andhra Pradesh, 80 percent of the displaced families belonged to Scheduled and other Backward Castes, and 75 percent of the did not possess any land at all. (Barnabas, 1984). In Madhya Pradesh alone, about 36,200 ha. of land has been taken away from the tribals due to the implementation of various projects. Out of these, several thousands of ha. of land have been lost due to submergence of dam site villages and establishment of factories, industrial complexes, and townships. About 1,162 villages have thus been evacuated. (Maheswari, 1987). A report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Tribes reveals that about 119 large irrigation and hydro-electric projects implemented in various parts of the country up to 1987 had displaced about 16.94 lakh people. Of them about a half (8.14 lakhs) are tribals. (Rai, 1987). Further, the information collected on 36 projects in 1987 in different parts of the country shows that 5.4 lakhs tribal people have been displaced. (TRTI, 1987). The Working Group on the Development of Tribes has estimated that

almost every development projects has displaced tribals and their proportion among the uprooted ranged from 52 percent to 100 percent. (Reddy, 1993). All these figures clearly indicate that these projects are exerting a considerable impact on the life of the tribals.

The rehabilitation of the evicted tribals is the most serious aspect of displacement. Forests and natural surroundings are not provided for the evicted people in the new resettlement colonies. This shatters their economic, social, cultural and physical links. This upheaval as well as disintegration of a stable society gives rise to problems of adjustment. Although rehabilitation of displaced tribal people requires micro level planning and a sensitive approach, the actual process always results in brutal uprooting from their land and total dispossession and disempowerment.

Between the first two Five Year Plans the number of family displaced due to development project in Bihar was estimated at 46,644, while it was 20,927 in Orissa, and 15,352 in West Bengal. Only 25 percent of these families were resettled. (Viegas & Menon, 1985). The Mithon and Panchat Dams under the Damodar Valley Project displaced 5,157 families, but only 464 families were rehabilitated. The Hirakud Project in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh could rehabilitate only 300 out of 1,636 displaced families. (Rao, 1986a). The Bhakra Nangal Dam which was constructed during 1950s could arrange resettlement of only 33 percent of displaced families till 1978. (The Hindu, 1986).

While considering the problems of displacement from agricultural lands, the scene in Maharashtra and Gujarat is one case of severe human distress. In Maharashtra during 1951-61, out of 22,845 displaced families only 54 percent could be resettled. Similarly during 1971-72, out of 4,477 families displaced by 24 projects, only 37 percent were rehabilitated. Further, during 1976-77, 1,127 families were displaced from a total holding of 958 ha., that is an average of 0.85 ha. each. Of these only 797 were resettled with an average holding of 0.16 ha. In 1975-76, in Gujarat 2,923 tribal families were displaced and they lost on an average 2.02 ha. of land per family. Of these only 1,995 families were resettled on 2,115 ha., thus giving each family an average holding of 1.06 ha. This amounts to an average land loss of approximately 50 percent per family (Viegas & Menon, 1985). Under Ukai Dam in Gujarat, out of 18,500 families displaced, only 3,500 could be resettled. Nothing could be done for 15,000 families who were either landless labourers or forest produce gatherers or jungle land cultivators. Out of the total distribution of Rs.7 crores by way of compensation, only one crore was put in bank deposits. The rest was grabbed either by the moneylenders or the low-level bureaucrats (Joshi, 1987).

Panchet Dam is another instance wherein the prolonged struggle of the displaced people has been recorded. Started in 1958, it required 21 villages to be submerged, thus uprooting about 1,200 families. No notice of land acquisition was given and the details of compensation remained a rumour only. The village leaders and the local elite took the opportunity to grab all they could in this situation of uncertainty (C.S.E, 1985).

**Table 3**  
**Displacement and Submergence of Lands Due to a Few Irrigation and Hydel Projects in India.**

Name of Project	No: of villages affected	No: of families displaced	No: of persons displaced	Total land submerged (ha.)
Balimela	89	1,907	7,382	5,272
Bhakra			36,000	16,629
Bhopalapatnam – Inchanpalli	200		75,000	1,72,000
Chaskaman	25	5,000	15,000	
Deolong			1,27,000	51,648
Dhom	29		17,784	2,050
Hirakud	249	1,636	20,000	
Jayakwadi			65,300	39,833
Kadana			65,300	17,722
Koyna	100		30,000	11,555
Lalpur	22		11,346	4,300
Machkund	225	2,406		9,109
Mahi	121	6,795	35,000	
Maheswar	58		9,420	4,856
Nagarjunasagar			28,000	28,480
Narmada Sagar	254		1,29,000	91,348
Omkareswar	27		12,295	9,393
Panchet			10,000	15,327
Pong			80,000	30,364
Rengali	164	10,000	60,000	42,877
Rihand	700		1,00,000	
Salia	15	278	1,416	1,134
Sardar Sarovar	237	10,758	2,00,000	34,867
Srisaillam	100	20,728	1,00,000	43,289
Tawa			38,600	20,236
Tehri	95		70,000	19,600
Tungabadra	90	11,684	54,454	34,936
Ukai	170		52,000	
Upper Kolab	147	3,067	9,000	32,163

Sources: Reddy (1992); Fernandes & Thukral (1989)

While most oustees are small and marginal farmers or landless people or tribal communities with no land titles, the beneficiaries of river valley projects are mainly medium and big farmers, and urban and industrial interests. All case studies of displaced people indicate that only a small percentage of them are resettled and real rehabilitation and socio-cultural-economic restoration are never even considered seriously. This is

particularly true in the case of tribal communities who have an entirely different social, cultural and spiritual background. Once uprooted from their land and lifestyle, they are easily cheated and suppressed by local powerful landowners, politicians and the police. Being scattered and disorganized, they cannot protect themselves from these powerful elements who often forcefully occupy the land allotted to them

Although there are no comprehensive figures of the relationship between the income and social status of dam-affected oustees, some micro-studies point out that a considerable number of oustees belong to groups that can be described as small and marginal farmers, scheduled castes, backward castes, tribals and other weaker sections of the society (Patel, 1986; Ganopadhyay, 1983). Other studies, for instance, of the Fact Finding Team to the Srisailem Project, point out that in this project, about 141 backward caste (BC) and 132 scheduled caste (SC) households were displaced out of the total of 344 households (FFSSP, 1986). Similarly, in the Narmada Sagar and Sardar Sarovar projects, the two main Narmada Valley project dams, it is estimated that the landless community comprises 43 per cent and 30 per cent respectively of the total number of oustees (Alvares and Billorey, 1987). V.P.Patel points out that in certain areas, well over 85 per cent of the landless community belong to scheduled tribes (Patel, 1986). A Government of India proposal points out that out of the 65,198 oustees of the Gosikhur project in Maharashtra, as many as 11,578 or 17.76 per cent are landless (Fernades and Thukral, 1989). While the proportion of the total population displaced in the case of Karjan, Maithon, Panchet and Pong dams can be as high as 50 per cent of the total population, it is the lowest, at about 18.34 and 18.92 per cent of the population, in the case of Hirakud and Ukai dams respectively, while averaging as high as 61.63 per cent.

Even government sources like the report of the Scheduled Area and Scheduled Tribe Commission, 1960-61 (GOI, 1962) point out that a large proportion of the oustees are tribals and not all of them are resettled on land, and when they are, the amount of land is paltry in comparison to their old settlements.

### **Dams and Displacement in Kerala**

Kerala has sixty river valley project sites, half of which are hydel and the other half irrigation dams. The hydel dams have all come up in the forested hill areas in Western Ghats and the irrigation dams are located amidst the foot hills, both submerging large tracts of forests and / or fertile valleys. The tribal societies living within the Reserved Forests where these dams requiring extensive forest clearance have come up have been displaced without any documentation, compensation or rehabilitation. These community settlements inside the Reserved Forests are referred to as 'Forest Settlements' without any legal land ownership rights. They have no political clout or organizational skills to resist mega development projects devouring their lands, which for them are not private property but life support systems with which their lives and survival of generations are intimately linked. While being flooded out of their only homes by dams, or other similar development, they are unable even to voice their pleas for justice.

There has been no detailed documentation of project-affected people in Kerala. Prakash (2002) describes the dam site settlements of Kadar tribals in the Prambikulam area in the Chalakkudy river basin where six dams have displaced hundreds of families. The tribal families who have themselves temporarily 'settled' in these 'colonies' with no proper housing or land for cultivation are in a pathetic state of total impoverishment. The Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary which has come up in the area further curtails their movements and natural resource availability. The extensive monoculture plantations that have been raised in the area after clearfelling natural forests have degraded the ecology of the entire basin and impoverished the Kadar people.

After the construction of large dams in many forested areas in Kerala, the adjacent catchment forests have been declared Wildlife Sanctuaries. The Periyar Tiger Reserve, Neyyar, Peppara, Chenduruny, Parambikulam, Peechi – Vazhani, Chimoni and Idukki Wildlife Sanctuaries are all protected areas in the catchments of river valley projects. These protected areas have further alienated the tribals from their lands and have severely restricted their fishing, hunting, gathering and settling rights in the forests.

There are proposals for a number of hydel and irrigation dams, viz. the Pooyankutty Hydro Electric Project, the Athirappilly HEP, the Karappara –Kuriyarkutty HEP, the Vamanapuram Irrigation Project etc., all of which will destroy the last remaining valley forests in the southern Western Ghats and also displace tribals and other communities living in the forests and directly dependent on the natural resources. The proposed augmentation schemes of some of the existing dams also would displace more families, most of whom would be suffering displacement for the second or even third time.

**Table 4**  
**Protected Areas in the Catchments of Dams in Kerala**

Protected Area	Area (Sq. Km.)	Year
Periyar Tiger Reserve	777	1950
Neyyar WLS	128	1958
Peechi- Vazhani	125	1958
Parambikulam	285	1973
Idukki	70	1976
Peppara	53	1983
Chimony	85	1984
Chenduruny	100.32	1984
Thattekad	25	1983
Total Area	1648	

Source: Prakash (2002)

The recently published study carried out by the Indian Social Institute, Bangalore and Loyola College of Social Sciences, Thiruvananthapuram (Murickan et.al., 2003) is the only attempt at collecting and presenting available data regarding land acquisition and

displacement of people for development projects in Kerala. According to them most projects do not have Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) Plans. Adequate data is not available even for projects having R&R Schemes to accurately implement meaningful rehabilitation measures.

### **Number of Displaced Persons of Water Resource Projects in Kerala.**

Out of the several projects studied in detail by Murickan et.al., (2003), data for 8 river valley projects are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**  
**Number of Families / Persons Displaced by Water Resource Projects.**

Name of the Project	Type	Families	Persons	Source
Asurankundu Reservoir Scheme	NA	31	164	Collectorate, Thrissur.
Idukki Hydroelectric Project	Hydel	1,394	7,388	Revenue divisional office, Idukki
Kallada Irrigation Project	Major	410	2,000	Chief Engineer, KIP, Kottarakara.
Kanjirapuzha Irrigation Project	Major	44	233	Executive Engineer, KIP, Oral Information.
Karappuzha Irrigation Project	Medium	322	1,052	Report of 'Kayal', Nellarachal.
Muvattupuzha Valley Irrigation Project	Major	120	636	Exe. Engineer, MVIP, Thodupuzha.
Venganallur Reservoir Scheme	NA	45	238	Collectorate, Thrissur.
Pooyamkutty Hydroelectric Project	Hydel	184	773	KFRI, Peechi.
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,550</b>	<b>12,484</b>	

Among the 1394 families affected by the Idukki dam, many were tribals. By taking the average family size of Kerala as 5.3, Murickan et.al., (2003) have calculated that 7,388 people were displaced by the Idukki dam. However according to Ramachandran et.al., (1985) the number of persons displaced by Idukki Dam are 4,544. They concluded that three villages namely Ayyappankoil, Kanjiyar, and Vairamony were completely submerged by the dam. No figures are available for the tribals, but their report acknowledges that there were tribal settlements like Mattukota, Marikulam and Thonithady around Ayyappankoil.

Of the 14 major irrigation projects studied, data was available only for three. They have displaced 2,869 persons. Taking the average of multipurpose and major irrigation projects (excluding the extreme values) of 956 persons as a representative figure, the number of displaced persons of another seven projects (excluding Malampuzha and Chalakkudy River Diversion, which were started only in 1949, and Pampa Irrigation Project and Idamalayar Project which is in its initial stage) would be 6,692. Accordingly leaving out above four, the ten major and multipurpose projects would have displaced 9,561 persons.

Of the ten medium irrigation projects, six are completed projects which had started in the 1950s. Going by the estimate given by knowledgeable persons that a minimum of 500 persons would have been displaced by each project, it is calculated that 3,000 people would have been displaced by the 6 projects.

The story of the Karappuzha irrigation project in Wayanad is a typical case of the injustice involved in displacement of people, especially by a river valley project. The project had acquired 1,500 acres of land from Ambalavayal and Thomotuchal villages way back in 1970. But the dam is nowhere near completion. When commissioned it will evict 1,300 persons including 217 tribals, of whom 530 are already displaced and the rest continue to stay in the waterspread area. A sum of Rs.70 lakhs was set aside for the R&R of the evicted families. But nothing has been done in this respect. Land acquired for the project 20 years ago is kept unutilized. The Nellarachal valley, which as the name implies was once the rice bowl ('nellara') of Nilambur Kovilakam now lies wasted and parched. The 217 tribal families belonging to Paniya, Naikan, Chetti and Kuruma are uprooted but not resettled anywhere. Acute water scarcity, poverty and cultural collapse haunt these once self-sufficient, robust people.

The number of families displaced by 4 hydel projects namely Panniyar (300-500 families), Sengulam (500 families), Neriya Mangalam (100-200 families) and Idamalayar (100-150 tribal families) as per official as well as key informants will come to around 5300 persons. Extrapolating the number of people who could have been ousted by the four other hydel projects viz. Poringalkuthu, Sholayar, Sabarigiri and Lower Periyar taking the minimum number of families displaced per project as 100, these projects would have displaced around 2,120 people. Thus the total number of DPs of hydel projects according to Murickan et al., 2003 would be 15,581. Of the 773 people threatened to be displaced by the Pooyankutty Project, 62% are tribals. Most of the PAPs of Idukki, Karappuzha and Idamalayar projects are tribals.

All large mega development projects have huge unforeseen costs, not merely difficult to estimate ecological loss but very tangible human costs also. Yet till now they have been hidden or grossly understated. A more accurate accounting of such costs is very essential for assessing the present modality of development and to make it more equitable and sustainable.

## Displaced Persons of Proposed Water Resources Projects.

The proposed water resources projects in Kerala would displace 18,948 families involving 1,00,424 persons. This is nearly 4 times the number people displaced by water resource projects during the period, 1951-95. There is no published data on the PAPs of Chamravattom, Attappady, Karappara and Kakkadavu. These projects are probably shelved for the time being.

**Table 6**  
**Number of Families to be Displaced by the Proposed Water Resource Projects**

Project	Families	Persons	Source
Mananthavady multipurpose	11,000	58300	Philipose, Fedina, S.Bathery
Chundelipuzha	2000	10600	Do
Kallampathy	5000	26500	Do
Vamanapuram	438	2321	Malayala Manorama ,2000
Chaliyar	210	1113	Chief Engineer, Irrigation Dept. 1998.
Banasura Sagar	300	1590	Sukumaran Nair, KIRTADS, Kozhikode
Total	18948	1,00,424	

Source: Murickan et.al. (2003)

Confronted with widespread injustice, humankind has always responded by enforcing changes upon the existing social order. The means to implement the change could be violent or it could be peaceful. This change is sometimes called 'Revolution'. The effected change might last long or could be short-lived. Yet, change there had always been.

In recent history there had been very many instances of wars and genocide that have deeply touched our collective conscience by their sheer violence and destruction. Yet, most of us have unquestionably accepted events such as large displacement of human populations against their own wishes in the name of development. We are not even aware of the sheer magnitude of the human violence unleashed in this process. The extent of destruction of all that we consider precious often enough has not even been suspected.

Large dams and the consequent displacement of people in peacetime imposed upon them by the civil society, of which the victims are perhaps a less influential part, provides an appropriate case study of large-scale injustice without any war.

Hence it is primarily an ethical requirement and only there after an academic exercise to attempt to account for the innocent victims of the weapons of modern development such as large dams.

## **Background of the Present Study**

Large dams and the consequent displacement of people provide not only a case study of violence within the modern human society, it also provides a very illustrative example of the other undeclared war – our war against our own living surroundings.

The second half of the twentieth century presented humankind with two simultaneous nightmares. The first was the ever-present fear of the Third World War which will be fought with nuclear weapons. The fizzling out of the cold war towards the end of the twentieth century has not altogether eliminated the fear of the end of our civilization with a nuclear bang. Yet there is growing hope that sanity will prevail upon the leaders of nations which have stockpiled nuclear weapons.

The second nightmare is the more diffused feeling of horror of having to watch impotently, the unfolding scenario of the global environmental collapse. As time passes this fear has only increased. New scientific findings, experiences of individuals, societies and nations added ever increasing dimensions to what is going wrong with the world's environment. Although most of this environmental havoc is primarily due to human greed and mismanagement, very little is being done to rectify this situation. This adds to our despair.

Water is the specific theme wherein most other human wrong doings impact upon and recoil hurting us at the very root of our survival. Droughts, floods, desertification, global climatic change, water pollution, misuse of water and conflicts between sections of people and between nations have burgeoned into a threatening mushroom cloud worse than that from a nuclear bomb.

Sanity of political leadership, possibilities of dialogue or at least sheer instinct for self-preservation could help us prevent pressing the nuclear trigger. But issues related to water are far more complex. All environmental issues are complex, poorly understood and beyond the grasp of most people because our knowledge regarding these issues are of a technical nature. The response of the world community to most pressing issues such as global warming, which has a direct impact on water, are very inadequate. Many of our attempts at the apparently feasible remedial actions end up with disastrous consequences. Perhaps humankind simply lacks the will to take the 'U' turn to survival.

Large water impoundments and extensive redistribution of river waters through canals have been a solution for water scarcity or to enhance water availability, in particular during the second half of the twentieth century. Advancement of engineering technology had made it possible. Huge State investments on development, particularly through large dams became the vogue in both the competing leading countries of the world namely, USA and USSR. Thus dam construction became an accepted political trend for the rest of the world irrespective of ideology. Damming the rivers came to be accepted as a simple, direct and quick solution for a range of developmental goals such as hydro power generation, enhancing irrigation, flood control and so on. Through under valuing or masking various environmental and social costs this was also made out to be

economically cheap. All sections of the society whether urban or rural, rich or poor and all sectors such as industry, agriculture, transportation, fishery or recreation appeared to benefit equally and simultaneously.

After the domestication of animals, crops and landscapes, domesticating dynamic natural resource systems such as the hydrological cycle appears to be a logical sequential step in human 'advancement'. It was but asserting human 'mastery' over 'nature'. Yet the negative consequences of this water resource development model was also becoming more and more apparent. If earlier the concerns were about destruction of forests and riverine ecosystems, or the possibility of spreading of water borne diseases, gradually the implications of damming on the global biogeochemical cycles itself have begun to cause alarm. The skewed economic balance sheet of large dams, the short term as well as generational injustice ingrained in such irrevocable manipulations such as dismembering the world's largest rivers could no longer be wished away. Political conflicts over iniquitous water sharing have become the most volatile flash point leading to armed conflicts in most of the continents.

As most of the world's habitable surface area has been occupied and drastically altered by man, the value of the remaining natural areas have increased disproportionately to their physical extent. Hence the remaining stretches of wild rivers, valley forests, even individual riverine species and the residual 'primitive' human communities dependent on river ecosystems have become incomparably valuable.

There has to be a global audit on what is lost and what is gained due to what we vaguely label 'development'. How much sustainable our past developmental gains are and how much of the damage is irreparable we must find out accurately. We have to start setting right the reparable damage as early as possible as our numbers and needs are also increasing fast. The widest possible range of studies have to be taken up from every corner of the world to document, analyse and reach conclusions regarding which of our actions are justifiable and sustainable. This is a gigantic task.

The small dam of Peppara across Karamana River in south Kerala with a small water spread area of about 8 sq.km., submerging that much area of forests and uprooting a few hundred Kani tribal people is but a tiny microcosm of all that current development is about. Hence a small pilot study was initiated to document the impact of this dam on the displaced tribal community.

### **Dams and Displacement – The Kerala Scenario**

The small State of Kerala has for long been considered as abundantly endowed with fresh water resources. In fact water available in Kerala was considered more than required which of course is only ecological ignorance. Terrainal conditions of the State favoured construction of dams across its many deep valleys in the Ghats and along the foothills carved out by its short quick flowing perennial rivers. A large number of hydel and irrigation dams were constructed in the State between the second half of the 1950s and the first half of 1980s. at present there are about sixty large and medium structures across

the 44 small drainage channels in the State. A single river of less than 200 km in length draining an area of hardly 1500 sq.km. could have as many as 12 large dams in Kerala.

Many of the dams were constructed in uninhabited forests in the Ghats on the eastern half of the State. But many were in areas along the foothills occupied by plains dwellers as well as by the tribal people. In locations like the High Ranges in Kerala as soon as a proposal for a dam is mooted in some forest track, large-scale encroachment into that forests results. As soon as the dam construction is over people occupying the submergible area will be given forest land elsewhere. This is not displacement and relocation but a strategy for getting forest lands disreserved for private occupation. Many of these forested valleys had tribal occupants but the area being Reserved Forests they had no title deeds or other documents to prove their occupation of the area. Filling up of the reservoir forced these people to shift elsewhere on their own. These real oustees do not appear in any documents and it is very difficult to trace their movements after one or two generations.

Forest lands were considered a sort of Government land reserve and there was no detail survey or enumeration of what is there in. In some cases before the reservoir was filled the timber was extracted in what is called salvage felling. The State was proud of its 'water resource development' through large dams. Till the Silent Valley controversy in the late 1970s, there was no serious attempt to trace and add up the consequences of the dam construction whether it is deforestation, biodiversity loss, consequences of the impoundment on the regional ecology, loss of forest industrial raw material resources or the loss of traditional resources for artisan communities such as bamboo, reed and canes. There is no economic auditing, not even tallying the initial estimated cost of the project with the actual expenditure on completion. There is no post construction monitoring of the sedimentation rate, changes in inflow rate, dam induced seismicity if any etc. Human displacement was not at all an issue till recently. The tribal community was forgotten and they encroached forest lands elsewhere. The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 stopped the release of forestland for non-forestry purposes and relocation of dam-displaced people became a problematic issue.

All the large dams in Kerala, starting with the oldest dam in the State i.e. the Mullaperiyar dam across Periyar constructed in 1895 had involved some human displacement. Possibly excepting one or two dams in the Palakkad plains all the rest of the dams in Kerala had displaced tribal communities. Even where permanent settled tribal societies did not exist, semi-nomadic tribal societies such as Malampandarams in the Pampa basin and Kadas in the Chalakudy basin were seriously affected. The richest part of their foraging range and the best riverine tract were lost to them. In the case of all other dams there was direct physical displacement causing serious social disruptions which still remain undocumented.

The activities of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) during the late 1980s and 1990s brought worldwide attention to the plight of dam oustees from the Sardar Sarovar dam across the Narmada River who number more than two lakhs spread over the States of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The policy of the World Bank towards

funding large dams was itself influenced through this agitation and Government of India was forced to initiate measures to formulate a National Rehabilitation Policy more than fifty years after Independence and after constructing more than 3300 large dams. Due to the activities of the NBA several independent studies were initiated in the Narmada basin and elsewhere regarding dam displacement and rehabilitation of developmental refugees. As part of national studies some data was generated from Kerala also regarding Project Affected People (PAP). These published information mostly dating from the 1990s, when cross-checked with personal knowledge of some sites in the State brought out shocking inadequacies on the data base regarding dam displacement in Kerala.

Impact assessment studies of development projects with significant adverse impact on the ecosystems, specifically on the human habitat are relatively few and mostly are of recent origin. Most of the studies are on the impact of large dams and are focused on the riverine ecosystems or the forests. Most of the data on the affected people are on the extent of land and material assets destroyed along with estimates of people displaced. Even then studies on the precise number of people displaced or on the complex consequences of disrupting the intricately co-ordinated survival strategies of neighbouring communities are extremely few. Most of such studies have been initiated long after the implementation of the developmental schemes and hence data generated will have serious shortcomings. The displaced people are invariably scattered far and wide and are very difficult to track down. For obvious political reasons the Government, which in most cases is the prime mover of the mega developmental schemes, distorts data regarding Project Affected People. The cascading effects of displacement of one community on the adjacent communities which are all intricately interdependent forming a dense mosaic of subcultures as in the case of Indian tribal heartlands is extremely complex. Hence they have not been attempted in India. Although anthropologists and rural development experts have been studying the tribal societies and their transition for a considerable time, the impact of such gigantic river valley projects as in the case of Srisaïlam or Nagarjuna Sagar in the tribal heartland of Andhra Pradesh or in the case of Hirakkud in Orissa have not even been mentioned in publications.

The project authorities to present a very rosy, profitable picture of their endeavour purposefully mask or gloss over inconvenient information or even put out blatant lies. Hence from published official data on large dams it is impossible to assess their impact on the human communities or on the ecology of the area. It was considered worthwhile exploring this topic in a small pilot study in a familiar terrain in Kerala. As the directly affected generation die out, reconstructing the history of displacement becomes impossible as the traumatized second generation responds emotionally to questions regarding the displacement and the third generation consisting of young people mostly products of tribal residential schools have no notions of their environment or the history of their community.

The hill areas and the forested areas are invariably endowed with surface water resources. Automatically as they are peopled by tribal communities, such areas will be labeled backward. The ecological soundness of tribal cultures had retained the forest cover and its modulatory control over the hydrological cycle. As the 'civilised' but degraded plains

demand more and more water and power, the civilized State would manipulate to control and take over the water resources of the area. Automatically all over the world the indigenous human communities have been victims of 'forest development' and 'river valley development'. In every case not only have they lost their survival resources, but even a routine share of the benefits of the so called development have been denied to them.

### **The People, the Area and the Dam**

Three tribal communities in the Western Ghats in Kerala have suffered maximally from dams. They are the Kadas of the Chalakudy basin, the Mannans of the High Ranges and the Kanis of the Agastyamalais.

The Kadas, a true rain forest tribe who had very little agricultural expertise and who depended heavily on the river and the forests are the worst sufferers. Eight large dams in the Chalakudy basin have submerged most of the valley forests in the basin and chopped up the river into lengths of deep silty reservoirs interspersed with segments of rocky dry river channels between the dams, as most of the dams are for inter-basin diversion. The evergreen forests in the higher reaches in the basin around Valparai, along the higher valleys of the Anamalais and the Nelliampathies have become tea, coffee or cardamom plantations. The lower plateau forests in Parambikulam or near Vazhachal have been converted to dry teak plantations or abandoned plantation sites. To reconstruct the details of the past dependence of the community on the forests before the first dam at Poringalkuthu came up in the 1940s is an extremely difficult task. Although threatened by another three major dams in their foraging range, the Kadas retain some semblance of their cultural identity even now.

The Mannans of the High Ranges mostly within the district of Idukki have been even more seriously affected by dams. The first dam in their area, i.e. Mullaperiyar was taken up in 1895. The gigantic Idukki Hydro Electric Project was constructed in the early 1970s and the Idamalayar dam in the early 1980s. Six major dams have practically wiped out the forest and riverine habitat of the Mannan abetted by massive encroachments into these forests by plains people. Even earlier since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century tea plantation industry had expelled a large population of Mannans from the south western and northern part of their range and converted them into a civilisation's fringe inhabitants trapped in slum like colonies. From the extremely scattered residual populations of Mannans it will be a difficult endeavour to retrace their displacement due to dams spread over more than a century. The destructive impact of encroachment into their habitat has erased most of their past.

The third tribal community severely affected by dams is the Kanis of the southern most part of the Western Ghats occupying both the eastern and western slopes of the Agastyamalai Ranges. Actually inter-basin transfers and large irrigation dams in the Ghat forests started in this part quite early. There are at present three major dams in the Kerala part of the Kani range and eight in the Tamil Nadu part of which five are on the eastern side in the Tamraparni basin. All these dams possibly with one exception in Tamil Nadu

had Kani inhabitants who were displaced from their settlements. The area available for their forest resource collection also have been severely curtailed. Even though not to the extent of tea plantations in the High Ranges, in the higher reaches of the Kani habitat also forests were destroyed for tea, particularly in the BBTC lease area in the Tamraparni basin. To a lesser extent half a dozen tea plantations were opened up in the Kerala part also. During the 1960s Sri Lankan repatriates were rehabilitated in the Keeripara area of Kanya Kumari district adjacent to Kerala border after clearing forests and converting them into rubber plantations. This was an area with a very large number of Kani settlements. After the State reorganization, extensive forests in the foothills of the Agastyamalais in Kerala which was traditionally Kani habitats (Kanippattu lands) were lost to encroachment. The remaining lower reach forests were cleared and converted to plantations of eucalyptus, albizzia etc. The dam construction and the conversion of forests during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have had a cascading effect on the Kanis. Displaced communities who settled down in the adjacent basin or in an area they found suitable for their cultivation and put down roots will be submerged or taken up for conversion uprooting them yet again within a few years.

Kanis are essentially an agricultural community who practised shifting cultivation. They also collected food items and hunted from the forests. They are more sophisticated than the Kadas or the Mannans and have a more complex social, cultural matrix. They imbibed considerably from the mainstream cultures yet retained their identity till now. The Kanis directly affected by the Peppara dam were selected for a pilot study. This was taken up as a part of an effort to document tribal displacement due to dams in the Kerala part of the Western Ghats.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

... and my love of Earth echoes through  
the drowned trees inside brown  
rivers deep in winter,  
and swelling birth along the woods.  
i think of everyday when time  
grows, bringing the land against  
my chest, and birds sing wildly over  
my roof, waking the trees into  
a sun, i walk overhead  
and remember of being told  
that no knife must pierce  
inside Her hair...

Native American Lament

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **REFUGEES – DYNAMICS OF DISPLACEMENT**

**“... Displacement should be carried out like a battle action.  
... And the people are to move ... and to take  
more ideology with them than old furniture”**

**Officials of the Xiianjiang Dam in China**

## **CHAPTER I**

### **THE PRESENT STUDY**

**Forests, River Valley Projects and Displacement – A Pilot Study of the  
Impact of Displacement by the Peppara Dam on the Kani Tribal  
Families in the Vithura Panchayat of the Thiruvananthapuram District.**

**“My heart is moved by all I cannot save:  
So much has been destroyed.  
I have to cast my lot with those  
who age after age perversely  
with no extraordinary power,  
reconstitute the world”.**

**- Adrienne Rich**

## **CHAPTER II**

### **KANIS – A TRIBAL PEOPLE ON THE MOVE**

**The issue of (native) identity continues to be contentious. It has its own very interesting and troubling history(ies), changing by the decade to match the times.**

**- Gerald R Mc. Master**

## **CHAPTER III**

### **VOICES OF THE OUSTEES**

**“No foreign sky protected me,  
No stranger’s wing shielded my face  
I stared as witness to the common lot  
Survivor of that time, that place”.**

**- Anna Akhmatova (Requiem)**

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **IMPOVERISHMENT RISKS – THE QUESTION OF EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

“We will request you to move from your houses after the dam comes up. If you move, it will be good. Otherwise we shall release the waters and drown you all”.

- **Indian Finance Minister, Morarji Desai speaking at a public meeting in the submergence zone of Pong Dam, 1961.**

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISPLACEMENT – A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Resistance and such stubbornness  
Thwart the most glorious success  
Till in the end, to one’s disgust  
One soon grows tired of being just.**

- **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, 1833**

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **BEYOND COMPENSATION, RESETTLEMENT AND REHABILITATION**

**“...every person who will be uprooted from the soil... will exchange his shovel for a decent cottage, darkness for light and fanaticism for faith”.**

- **N.V.Gadgil, Minister in charge of India’s Multi-Dam Damodar Valley Corporation, 1948**

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **ECODEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

**“Are these harms that have too often gone unrecognized, unnamed, unaddressed? Can and should there be alternatives to traditional institutional responses? Should working through the emotions of victims and survivors figure prominently in the goals for the nation or the world, or instead find a place as a byproduct of fact-finding, guilt finding, and punishment?”**

**- Martha Minow**

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

**“The human race never solves any of its problems, it only outlives them”.**

**- David Gerrold, 1978**

## CHAPTER I

### The Present Study

#### **‘Forests, River Valley Projects and Displacement - A Pilot Study of the Impact of Displacement by the Peppara Dam on the Kani Tribal Families in the Vithura Panchayat of the Thiruvananthapuram District’**

### Conceptual Statements

- ❖ In hilly terrain large dams submerge the best valley forests. Dams and reservoirs ecologically degrade surrounding areas and also displace indigenous communities whose survival is directly dependent on the natural resources of the area.
- ❖ Destruction of natural resources and the extinction of community knowledge to use the resources sustainably are closely related and each accelerates the other.
- ❖ Efforts to resettle ethnic communities who have been uprooted from their natural resource base have been a failure. Rehabilitating them and socially and culturally rejuvenating them have been next to impossible for a variety of reasons.
- ❖ Ecodegradation is persistent poverty. Dams and deforestation impoverishes a large section of both tribal and non-tribal people in the vicinity, especially women. Such project-affected people will depend more heavily on the remaining forests intensifying the conflict between forest protection and people’s survival.

Among the various categories of project-affected peoples (PAPs), the most tragic and devastating is the uprooting suffered by the dam displaced. The forested hill areas where most of the large dams are constructed have large concentrations of tribal inhabitants. In Kerala the tribal societies living within the Reserved Forests where most of the dams or other government sponsored large development projects requiring extensive forest clearance have come up, do not have legal ownership for the land they occupy. They have no political clout or organizational skill to resist mega-development projects devouring their lands. Often even while being flooded out of their only homes by dams, or expelled by other similar development projects, they are unable even to voice their pleas for justice.

Once the more fertile valleys are lost they have no choice but to make use of the unsuitable, less productive higher slopes, that too if the Forest Department permits them. Their earlier viable valley agriculture is forever lost. This includes the loss of the entire spectrum of cultivars suited to the locality which they have evolved over a long period. The physical uprooting and scattering of their original villages and communities shatter their social order. They are subjected to the dehumanizing influence of abject poverty and outside exploitation. Forest Laws often get applied stringently against groups like the tribal people while extensive violation of the same Laws by the State leading to

massive forest destruction continues unabated. Till the recent Narmada Bachao Andolan's effort, the issue of displacement of communities by dams and the absence of rehabilitation of PAPs were conveniently forgotten. There have not even been any human rights appeal. In Kerala also sections of the society particularly tribal people, have been dislocated by various river valley projects. Excepting a study by the Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, and a cursory enumeration of dam displaced people in India compiled from official data, by the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, there has not been any detailed documentation of these displacements.

A number of Kani settlements in the Peppara basin in southern Kerala have been displaced partially or completely during the early 1980's by the Peppara Dam. Some have been 'resettled', others have been left to fend for themselves. The threat of dislocation looms large over some of the remaining Kanis of the same area because of a plan to augment the water storage capacity of the dam built to supply water to the Thiruvananthapuram city.

Tribal people who live inside forests may have better knowledge or more skills for carrying out the collection of usable biological material from the forests. They may also have the physical capability to range more extensively or have the cultural expertise to collect more effectively. Their methods of collection could also be more sustainable. The lifestyles of the forest tribal people may enable them to make better use of the available resources. Hence there is considerable interest at present in the non-timber forest produce (NTFP) in the forests and the uses of such materials by the tribal people. The methods of collection and processing of these materials also is of great value.

Forest dwelling tribal societies cultivate part of their food requirements and the rest they collect from the wild. Some material from both these categories may also be sold. The complexity of the agricultural pattern of any tribal society not only depends upon their tradition but it also depends upon the ecological conditions of the surrounding forests. Traditional tribal cultivation differs significantly from modern agricultural practices. Crop varieties, cropping patterns, landuse intensity and energy subsidies are all different. Role of men and women in agriculture also differs considerably between the two. From the complex shifting cultivation pattern, which in the earlier mode are no longer practised in the Western Ghats, tribal cultivation has now become very like the intensive cultivation of cash crops like rubber, arecanut, pepper etc. practised by the plains people. Tribal people also change the species composition of forests surrounding their settlements to meet their food and other requirements. In Kerala, for example this has resulted in the increased numbers of jack, mango, emblica and other edible perennial species in the forests around tribal settlements. In tribal cultivation, conventional crops like paddy, legumes, dry cereals, tuber crops might still retain cultivars not found elsewhere.

The Kerala Forest Department has been converting extensive areas of natural forests to monoculture plantations mostly of teak and eucalyptus. This has severely limited the availability of diverse material from the forests. Forest degradation automatically affects agricultural productivity of the small tribal farmsteads forcing more people into the

forests to collect material for food and for marketing. We need to understand in detail the impact of deforestation along with that of ecodegradation and displacement that come along with river valley projects.

Along with the commissioning of the Peppara dam, the whole catchment area of the reservoir was declared as the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary with an area of 53 sq.km. The Sanctuary management prescriptions severely restrict the forest dependent activities of the Kanis. The extensive Eucalyptus and Albizzia plantations raised by the Kerala Forest Development Corporation (KFDC) in the fringe of the Sanctuary also has resulted in massive deforestation and consequent depletion of the natural resource base of the tribals.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of the study are:

- ❖ to study the impact of dam displacement on the life of the Kani tribal population in the Peppara area.
- ❖ to monitor the impact of the dam and subsequent development activities on the forest resource base of the Kanis and their basic survival and subsistence strategies.

### **Methodology**

Being a social anthropological and ecological study, both qualitative as well as quantitative methods were employed. Participatory research methodologies such as semi-structured interviews, group discussions, family-wise surveys of all the displaced people and documenting individual case studies were employed as required. Historical time-line exercise was done with all the elder women and men in both the officially allocated settlements as well as in the hamlet they themselves chose to settle. Oral testimonies of all the elders, both women and men (who are still alive and able to communicate) and the tribal chiefs called 'Moottukanis' of the submerged villages on the whole story of eviction and resettlement from the time they came to know about it to the present were recorded.

Farm profiles and the status of existing forests the Kanis depend for survival were mapped. Discussions were held with concerned officials, Panchayat members and S.T.Promoters about their perceptions on the rehabilitation and development measures to be adopted in the area. As far as possible tribal youngsters who showed leadership initiative were encouraged to participate in the surveys and data collection.

On the basis of field visits all the families displaced by the Peppara dam were contacted. Through lengthy and leisurely personal discussions, the human story was documented. The process of uprooting from their original villages, the compensation package offered and received and their present dwelling conditions were documented. Their existing agriculture and landuse practices were recorded.

Detailed information on their various subsistence activities such as NTFP collection, fishing, collection of wild edible tubers and other plants and animals, employment opportunities in the Forest Department etc. were collected.

Their perceptions on their present social, cultural and economic conditions as well as the various development measures carried out in their area were also documented in detail.

The responses of the Kani to the Ecodevelopment Programme being implemented in the Peppara Sanctuary by the Kerala Forest Department were recorded in detail.

### **The Setting – The Dam and the Wildlife Sanctuary**

The study area falls within the Vithura Grama Panchayat in the Thiruvananthapuram District of Kerala. This area has a contiguous tract of forests spread across the Karamana and Vamanapuram river basins. This tract is inhabited by the Kani tribe.

#### **SPECIFIC STUDY AREA**

Name of Panchayat	Vithura
Total Area	131.56 sq. km.
Population	26,613 (1991 census)
Population density	202.29
Population of Scheduled Tribe	3,197
Number of Wards	14
Number of Wards where Kanis are staying	9 (Chettachal, Memala, Peppara, Anappara, Nettayam, Manali, Kallar, Theviode, Maruthamala)
Villages in which the Panchayat falls	Vithura (fully); Tholikkode and Thennoor (partially)
Block	Vellanad
Taluk	Nedumangad
Revenue District	Thiruvananthapuram
Wards in which the study area falls	Peppara, Maruthamala
Forest Divisions	Trivandrum Forest Division (Territorial), Palode Range, Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary of the Trivandrum Wildlife Division.
Drainage Basins	Karamana and Vamanapuram

The Peppara Dam on the Karamana River was commissioned by the Kerala Water Authority in 1984 for the augmentation of the Aruvikkara Dam providing drinking water to the Thiruvananthapuram city and suburbs. The total waterspread area of the dam is 5.82 sq.km. According to a recent study by the Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS) the present waterspread area of the Peppara dam is 8.496 sq.km. with a gross storage capacity of 38.4 million cubic metres of water. (Verma, 2003)

The Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary was constituted in the year 1983. The area was formerly a part of Paruthipally Range of the Trivandrum Territorial Division. It is one of the two

Wildlife Sanctuaries in the Thiruvananthapuram District, the other being the Neyyar Sanctuary. It has an area of 53 sq.km. of Reserved Forests surrounded by portions of the Palode Reserve to the north and west, portions of the Kottoor Reserve and the Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary to the south and Tamil Nadu Forests to the east across the watershed line.

### **Kani Tribal Settlements in the Peppara Sanctuary**

Around ten Kani hamlets (known as ‘Kanikkudy’) have been totally or partially submerged by the Peppara Dam. Seven villages near the reservoir have also been adversely affected by the dam construction and consequent development measures that have further destroyed their bio resources.

**Table 7**  
**Tribal Settlements in the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary**

Sl.No.	Name of Settlement	No. of houses	Population	Area holding (hectare)
1	Podiyakkala	38	155	6
2	Cherukadu	1	5	6
3	Chemmankala – I	8	38	30
4	Chemmankala – II	3	12	--
5	Kamalakom	13	62	34
6	Podiyam	23	98	75
7	Parandodu	5	17	16
8	Amode	8	28	16
9	Cherumankal	7	34	24
10	Mepathodu	9	52	59
11	Erampiadu	3	16	13
12	Kunnathery	9	31	30
13	Mlavila	11	41	26
14	Pattampara	6	27	14
15	Kompodinjil	6	22	14
16	Pothode	9	40	
17	Pattinipara	7	25	
18	Thondakal	1	8	
19	Kuruvampara	20	70	
	Total	187	781	363

Source: Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary Management Plan (1990-2000)  
Christopher (1997)

The Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary has 14 Kani tribal settlements and the total area of these settlements according to the Kerala Forest Department (1990) is approximately 350 ha. The Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary Management Plan (1990-1991 to 1999-2000) states that out of the 14 Kani settlements inside the Sanctuary, 12 are proposed for relocation. The

cultivation and dwelling places of the hill tribes residing inside the Sanctuary are subjected to heavy damage by wild animals. There is a proposal to erect live wire fencing around Chemmankala and Podiyakkala settlements.

According to the Sanctuary Management Plan, “the tribal settlers are exercising certain rights in respect of cultivation in lands under their possession and collection of non timber forest products through the Girijan Co-operative Society. Timber required for house construction is made available to them at a concessional rate. The developmental activities are implemented without alienating the tribals from their heritage and suddenly disrupting their livelihood. Considering the geographical position and intensity of interference, the Department had formulated schemes of rehabilitation”.

Podiyakkala is the settlement where the displaced people from the Peppara Dam have been resettled by the combined efforts of the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) and the Kerala Forest Department. This settlement is in the western periphery of the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary. A few tribal families who resisted displacement and refused to accept the compensation offered to them have themselves cleared forests and settled in Chemmankala in the northeastern corner of the Sanctuary. The PHED and the Kerala Forest Department are supposed to have earmarked 110 ha. of land in Podiyakkala resettlement site but the displaced Kanis have only 50 ha. of land with them now.

The Kanis living inside the core area of the Peppara Sanctuary are in Kamalakom, Podiyam, Parandodu, Cherukadu, Amode, Cherumankal, Mepathodu, Erampiadu, Kunnathery, Mlavila, Pattampara and Kompodinjal. According to the forest officials, their habitations cause management problems to the Sanctuary. There is a proposal to relocate them outside the Sanctuary in the failed eucalyptus plantation of the Kerala Forest Development Corporation (KFDC) at Chathancodu. The relocation scheme envisages payment of compensation for their present cultivation, monetary assistance for construction of buildings in the new site, shifting charges, construction of approach roads, drinking water facilities and opportunities for self-employment.

According to Christopher (1997), 17 settlements are found inside the Peppara Sanctuary whereas the Sanctuary Management Plan (1990-2000) denotes only 14 settlements. Chemmankala-II, Pothode, Pattinippara, Thondakal and Kuruvampara are settlements not mentioned in the Sanctuary Management Plan and Cherukadu and Mepathodu are not mentioned by Christopher. The Sanctuary Management Plan estimates the total population of Kanis as 626 whereas Christopher calculates it as 726. According to Christopher (1997) out of the 17 settlements he has covered 13 are situated in the southern part of the Sanctuary while Podiyakkala, Kuruvampara, Chemmankala-I & II are positioned near the north-west boundary of the Sanctuary. In all these settlements, houses are dispersed with sufficient space for cultivation. Except Pothode all other settlements are located along the side of major or minor streams.

## **Podiyakkala Settlement**

It is located in a short narrow valley running from north-east to south-west hemmed in by steep ridges which rise up to 500m. A small stream drains the valley and empties into the Peppara reservoir. The ridges are rocky and only a degraded residue of the original semi-evergreen forest remains. Forests along the northern ridge is partly felled and converted to eucalyptus. There are many rocky outcrops along the ridges where man made fires have destroyed all vegetation and let the soil erode completely away. In the hollows along the ridges denser patches of forest remain in particular along the southern part. The valley floor located at less than 100m has reed thickets and swampy patches. All large trees along the valley floor have been removed.

Podiyakkala settlement can be entered from the north-east across the boundary ridges through a partially motorable 2km long coup road. This road branches off from the main Vithura – Peppara road and climbing steeply through Reserved Forests outside the Sanctuary, enters the hamlet from Anchumaruthumoodu. There are a couple of streamlets to be bridged for this road to be motorable round the year. This is the regularly used access path to the settlement. The second road into Podiyakkala enters the valley from the south-west. It is an old forest road branching off from near Peppara dam. It skirts the reservoir, running through acacia plantations for almost 8km, enters the settlement and meets with the earlier mentioned road near the Multi Grade Learning Centre. This road gets waterlogged in patches when the reservoir is full and elephants often linger along stretches of it denying its use to the Kanis.

The valley floor has forest alluvial soil and the valley edges have lateritic soil. There is very little good quality arable land within the area of the settlement. The forested swamps which used to occur along the meandering stream in the valley bottom have all been drained. After having been under paddy for a few years, they are all being converted to dry farmlands with mixed crops.

Most of the sloping land within the settlement have been or is being planted up with rubber. Everywhere within the settlement the large standing trees are being pollarded or heavily lopped. The south-east opening Podiyakkala valley is losing its tree canopy and is gradually drying up although the reservoir is close by. Perhaps its desiccation is partly because the reservoir is close by.

Towards east outside the valley the ridges gradually rise up to the main Western Ghat ridge which is also the inter-State boundary. Although degraded there is continuous forest cover all over these ridges. Towards north and west beyond the enclosing ridge there are no natural forests left around Podiyakkala. These forests have been felled and converted

to eucalyptus plantations and after extreme site degradation, are now being planted up with acacia or mangium. All these plantations and forests around the settlement burn practically every year due to forest fires started by man. There is very little regeneration in these forests.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **KANIS – A TRIBAL PEOPLE ON THE MOVE**

The Kanis are found in the southern-most part of the Western Ghats – the Agasthyamalai range of hills (also known as the Ashambu Hills). They live along the lower valleys and the forested foothills up to about 700 m. elevation along the outer slopes. Although originally inhabiting only forested areas, the receding boundary of the forests have left many Kani settlements stranded far outside the current perimeter of the forests.

Their history encoded in their songs (Chattu pattu) indicates that they moved into their current range from the eastern Kalladaikurichi, Kalakkad hills of the Thirunelveli District in Tamil Nadu since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This movement obviously must have been due to political as well as ecological reasons. Now they are distributed mostly within the eastern parts of Thiruvananthapuram and Kanya Kumari districts with a smaller population in the Kulathupuzha valley in the adjoining south-eastern corner of the Kollam district. There is also a small isolated population in the Papanasam hills of the Thirunelveli district.

The Kanis consider themselves as ‘Mala Arayas’ – a title given to them by the Travancore Maharaja whom they used to visit every year with gifts (‘Kanikka’) of a number of forest produce. Even now the elders do not like to consider themselves as ‘Adivasis’ or Scheduled Tribe. They believe that the ‘Kadal Arayas’ are their cousins who had migrated long ago to the coast to live as fisher folk, and they are the ‘Mala Arayas’ – rulers of the hills.

The Kanis live in small scattered settlements called ‘Kanikkudy’, each having about 10-15 families. The Parayas or Sambavas and the Pulayas (Scheduled Caste communities, occupying the scattered midland hillocks along the western coast) were their neighbours till recently.

#### **Traditional Lifestyle and Landuse of Kanis**

The Kanis, essentially cultivators, used to occupy the valleys of the rivers in the Agasthyamalai ranges. Extensive river valleys are lacking in this area. The Kanis preferred the tract along the foothills where the torrential hill streams join together to form the main channel. In the north-west extremity of the Kani range in the Kulathupuzha valley, there are extensive swampy flat stretches in the Yerur and Kulathupuzha Reserved Forests where the Kanis practiced wet paddy cultivation. Further south, such suitable lands were not plentiful and here they occupied the narrow steeper valleys and the gentler outer hill slopes where dry paddy and other cereals and pulses were cultivated under the ‘jhoom’ (shifting cultivation) system. The very type of terrain occupied by them formed the basis for a classification of Kanis (Nair, 1983) into two subgroups called (1) the ‘Velanmars’ on the periphery of the hills and (2) the ‘Malavelanmars’ or the true Kanikkars (Malankanis) living in the interior.

The slash and burn or jhoom cultivation of the Kanis was evolved probably in the drier, ecologically less sensitive eastern slopes of the Western Ghats. It used to have till recently a three-year fallow period after two croppings of dryland paddy sown in March-April and harvested during August-September. Besides paddy they used to have a large number of cultivars of foxtail millet (*Sataria italia*), common millet (*Panicum miliare*), green gram (*Phasiolus mungo*), sorghum (*Andropogon sorghum*), maize (*Zea maize*), sweet potato (*Ipomea batatus*), squash (*Cucurbita moschata*), turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), several varieties of plantains, ginger etc. for food and marketing. Occasional hunting with bows and arrows, catapult, traps and muzzle loading guns provided them with meat. They also practised fishing. Apart from dogs and poultry they never used to keep domesticated animals. There would often be wild animals kept as pets.

In 1892, Bourdillan estimated the Kani population to be about 2000 with the largest concentration in the Kothayar and Neyyar basins. In 1931, their number was estimated to be 6,659 excluding the small population in Papanasam hills. By 1971, their numbers had increased to 11,879 (Census of India, 1971). By 1981, in the Thiruvananthapuram district alone they numbered 14,145. According to the 1991 census, there are 16,181 Kanis residing in the Thiruvananthapuram district (Census of India, 1981, 1991).

### **Landuse Changes in the Kani Area**

Till the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the entire higher Ghat forests were uninhabited. The lower valleys were malarial and excepting the scattered Kani settlements, this region was also more or less uninhabited. There were only three or four difficult east-west tracks across the Ghats from the Tamil Nadu plains to the Kerala plains. In this part of Kerala, the crest line of the Ghats is very close to the west coast. Possibly due to the desiccation of the southern Tamil Nadu plains during the last few hundred years, there was some human influx into the southern west coast from the Tamil Nadu part of the Ghats. But the foothills and isolated hillocks in the plains were forested and uninhabited. The coastal valleys and backwater margins alone were densely settled and agriculturally extensively cultivated. (Nair, 1983)

### **The Expansion of Cash Crop Plantations**

With the consolidation of European colonizers during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and development of trade, there was a great demand for coir and copra and extensive low-lying areas were taken up for coconut cultivation. Pressure on paddy lands resulted in more and more valleys being taken up for cultivation inland. The European colonizers brought in a variety of cash crops such as coffee, tea, cashew etc. besides food crops such as tapioca. Many of the cash crops required humid tropical climate and for raising large-scale plantations of these cash crops, extensive forests were clear felled from the 1850s to 1890s in the Ghats. Most of these areas taken up first for coffee and later for tea were above 600 metres above the mean sea level and did not affect the Kanis directly. **But the opening up of the Ghat forests and sudden influx of large labour populations into the peaceful hills dealt the first serious blow to the Kanis.**

It is possible that a large number of Kanis from the Ashambu and Veerapuli forests in the extreme south close to the Mahendragiri where countless coffee estates were opened up possibly moved north to the Kothayar Valley at that time. They did not take up work in the tea estates nor did they get converted to modern ways. But the near total elimination of the extensive evergreen forests in these areas must have seriously curtailed their natural resource base as far as NTFP items were concerned. The large-scale forest clearance also had some impact on the microclimate adversely affecting their agro-ecosystems.

### **Forest Exploitation and Deforestation in the Kani Area**

After 1880, the Reservation of the hill forests started and excepting a few coffee and tea estates and leased Zamindari forests on the Kalakkad hills, practically the entire Agasthyamalai range including all the foothills and many extensive valley forests close to the plains became Government Reserved Forests. During this period there was no control over jhooming by the Kanis, and no systematic timber extraction by the Government.

From 1900, till the beginning of the Second World War, there was little change in the overall scenario. But the slow and steady extension of paddy cultivation along these valleys had set in motion the process of isolation of the outer hillocks from the main block of forests. This later on adversely affected the Kani settlements in those hillocks. Unable to compete with the plains-people, the Kanis were forced to leave or alienate their land, and move back deeper into the Ghat forests. Such vacated lands inevitably soon came to be occupied by the plains' people.

The construction of the Thiruvananthapuram – Shenkotta road and later the construction of number of spur roads from it towards east along each of the parallel east-west river valleys set in motion severe forest fragmentation. Forest plantations started taking up more and more of lower elevation forests in the fertile locations. Land was released from the Reserved Forest along the main Thiruvananthapuram – Shenkotta road under various schemes such as Colonization Programme, Grow More Food Campaign etc. which also led to considerable encroachment of the best accessible forest tracts. Extensive forests to the west of the Kani territory were lost due to the expansion of cultivation by the plains' people. As human interference and forest working by the Forest Department increased, the forests started getting degraded rapidly. This not only affected the agricultural practices of the Kanis but also reduced their natural resource base. Competition from outsiders for the various forest produce also increased.

### **Forest Plantations in the Kani Habitat**

Prior to Independence, the Kani forests were not extensively converted to plantations of teak as it happened in other locations in Kerala because naturally teak does not occur here. The main thrust of forest exploitation underwent a radical change in the 1950s. From the harvesting of timber from natural forests, the focus of forestry operations shifted to large-scale clear felling of natural forests and raising of monoculture plantations of tree species of industrial or commercial importance. Teak, rubber and

eucalyptus plantations replaced extensive stretches of natural forests in the Kani area. Since plantations require fertile soil, gentle slopes and accessibility, the lower valleys and outer slopes of the Ghats were automatically selected. These were the Kani habitats. Most of the smaller, isolated forest bits called 'pocket reserves' were converted or those too small were disreserved and released for cultivation. **This step had a very serious impact on the Kani population because the previously sheltered forest tribal groups were overnight thrown into harsh competition with the plains people in a resource depleted, rapidly irreparably degrading habitat.**

Many tribals who used to live in the rich forests of Pachamala, Chooliamala etc were overnight forced to survive in habitats which were no longer forests. Many were marooned in barren hillocks surrounded by plains people and cultivations. The entire framework of survival adaptations this society had evolved over a long period became irrelevant to the new resource situation nor was it possible for them to replace it with relevant expertise within a short timescale under the extreme competition they were subjected to.

In the late 1950s and 1960s many areas in the Kulathupuzha Reserve Forest in Kerala and the Kothayar Valley in Tamil Nadu were converted to plantations of rubber in the name of several projects for the rehabilitation of Sri Lankan repatriates. In the Thambraparni basin, during the 1960s large-scale teak plantation activity was initiated. As the new plantations and ahead of them the conversion coups advanced, the Kanis also shifted their settlements. At times they became easily available cheap labour for weeding and maintaining the plantations during the first two or three years after establishment of the plantations. This uprooting according to the convenience of the Forest Working Plans wrecked havoc with the traditional cultivation pattern and life style of the Kanis. Once the plantation cycle was over, most of the Kani areas had become dry teak plantations where further cultivation was prevented by the Forest Department. In any case agriculture would not have been viable in these areas. In one step, the Papanasam hill Kanis lost their traditional lifestyle and their basic survival resources.

During the 1960s eucalyptus became the preferred forest plantation species and extensive stretches of semi evergreen and moist deciduous forests on the western slopes of Agasthyamalai Hills, particularly in Klamala, Kottoor, Palod, Vamanapuram and Kulathupuzha Reserves, besides many smaller Reserves were converted to eucalyptus plantations. More than 3000 ha. of the best Kani habitat was lost to eucalyptus plantations. Eucalyptus being extremely unsuitable for the humid tropical, heavy rainfall and hilly tracts, destroyed totally the biotic productivity of the area. Hydrological regimes were disrupted and soil disappeared. The sterile poor quality plantations provide nothing for the tribals for sustenance excepting very sporadic labour opportunities during the initial planting or the final felling period. Even in ideal locations, the short rotation plantations which gets felled after six years cannot have any undergrowth or plant diversity either to provide the Kanis or any one else with any produce. **For most of the Kanis in the Vamanapuram and the Karamana basins these eucalyptus plantations have spelled only doom.** For them it was total elimination of all easily accessible resources overnight. Even when the small Kani settlements were left with a few acres of

degraded forest around their vicinity, the total aridification of the land due to the vast eucalyptus monoculture plantations left them with no choice on agricultural practices.

### **Kanippattu Lands**

There were legal aspects to the resource alienation of the Kanis peculiar to this part of their territory. In the Neyyattinkara Taluk of Thiruvananthapuram District, outside the Reserved Forest, but in between the cultivated plains and the Reserved Forest, there was a lightly wooded undulating belt of land traditionally occupied by the Kanis called the 'Kanippattu Lands'. Before land settlement, the Travancore Maharaja had acknowledged the claim of the Kanis over this land. At the time of land settlement, the Kanis refused to take individual titles for the land since they considered it their community land where they needed no individual rights. At the same time as pressure on arable land was increasing, inroads were being made into the Kanippattu Lands by the plains' people. Some of the Kanis also started alienating the lands to outsiders for money. The Government contested the right of the Kanis to sell the land and the issue went up to the High Court in 1944. The Court judgement was in favour of the Government's view that the Kanis are being treated as permissive tenants without the right to sell. More than 10,000 acres of Kanippattu Lands remained marginally used till 1950. Most of the forests in the area had already been destroyed and the short cycle jhoom cultivation had further destroyed the fertility of the land. The Kanis moved deeper into Government forests seeking virgin lands which at that time was not checked by the Forest officials. Meanwhile the Kanippattu Lands were all grabbed by land-seekers from elsewhere. **The Kanis in the Reserved Forests were eventually discouraged from their shifting cultivation practices destroying valuable forests. By the 1970s they were forced to 'settle down' within the Reserved Forests, Wildlife Sanctuaries etc. But they were not given 'pattas' (ownership title) for lands in their possession.**

### **Dams in the Kani Lands**

While forest management and land settlements were putting great strains on the Kani society, yet another development of far reaching implications for the Kanis also took place. The southern parts of the Thiruvananthapuram district and adjoining Kanya Kumari district have very high-density population along the coastal tracts. There are vast reaches of low-lying paddy lands on the southwestern coast – the Nanjinad area. The Princely State of Travancore had always been importing rice and hence great stress was placed on enhancing food production. Disruption of shipping due to the World Wars also injected a sense of urgency as imports from Burma were blocked.

Irrigation potential was sought to be enhanced to increase paddy production. The southern parts of Travancore receiving less rainfall compared with the rest of the west coast and with smaller rivers were chosen for irrigation development. The first irrigation dam was constructed in Parali Ar (Perunchani Dam). The Pechippara dam was also constructed well before Independence. After independence, during the first two Five Year Plan periods, irrigation dams were constructed in Neyyar and Kothayar. During the late 1960s in the northernmost river in the Kani territory, the Kallada dam construction

started. During the 1980s, the Karamana River was dammed at Peppara upstream of Aruvikkara to provide drinking water to the Thiruvananthapuram city. Each of these dams, except Kallada, submerged on an average 500 ha. of valley forests while the Kallada dam submerged about 4,800 ha. In addition to the loss of the valley, the surrounding forests were also heavily disturbed during the dam construction and subsequently due to the increased accessibility.

All the reservoirs of the above mentioned dams were in the base of the Ghats in forested valleys, the best and only habitat of the Kanis. Being illiterate and disorganized tribal people, they never received any compensation or rehabilitation assistance. They simply moved into the nearest forest tract available. Invariably this shifting was to far less suitable and more sensitive forests in the higher slopes or in the catchment areas of the dam reservoirs.

The construction of the dams opened up the previously inaccessible interior valleys. Large influx of population took place temporarily and even after the construction phase was over, townships developed in the dam sites and remained. This was apart from the illegal encroachments in the opened up areas which went unchecked. Besides the degradation pressures on the rapidly shrinking forests, the social conflicts such exposures engendered contributed to the destruction of the Kani society. They had always considered themselves to be the masters of the forests and then suddenly they were relegated to nonentities, to be pushed around. This resulted in a serious crisis of confidence in their minds. Discipline within the society disappeared. Lures of civilization were close by to tempt the younger generation in particular.

## CHAPTER III

### VOICES OF THE OUSTEES

It was only after the commencement of the study, after some futile search, it became clear that so little is documented. This should not be surprising. Yet the total lack of documentation of the actual happenings from the point of view of the people immediately, directly affected was unexpected.

Almost two decades have passed. Officials have retired, could not be traced. Documents, if any, have been lost. And from our point of view, what is considered important information is officially insignificant, almost trivial. For those directly affected by displacement, the passage of time has blurred dates, names, sequences. Many older people had since died. For the living old, the deep hurt of the injustice, broken promises, failure, the loss alone remain. The precise number of coconut or arecanut trees lost or the exact extent of paddy land submerged are not remembered. Only the burning memory of the richness taken away remains. May be the images are subjective, mere impressions. But there is nothing else to start from.

This study was a trial, an effort to document over a long period the displacement of tribal people in Kerala due to dams. In case of all the other instances also, data availability is the same. There is practically nothing. In many instances, generations have passed since displacement. Only indirect deductions can be made.

Hence finally in the case of the Kanis of Peppara it was decided to talk to as many people as possible who personally remembered displacement. It is not a question of approaching people with a questionnaire to collect some impersonal information. It is to get these living sensitive people to go back in time to the most painful event in their lifetime. It takes a lot of time. Moreover, being unschooled Adivasis, their memories are not in measures but in the larger frames of experiences. It is a question of meeting the person again and again, getting acquainted, establishing a relationship and of getting related.

Some excerpts from conversations from among many who talked at length are given below. It is qualitative. For this to be quantitative, to substantiate a basic hypothesis, many more dam sites and very many more personal narratives are needed. We are continuing.

#### ***The Moottukanis Who Resisted***

##### **Mallan – The Moottukani of Chemmankala**

***“I don’t want your money compensation, nor the land that you offer”.***

A small man of remarkable strength of character, Mallan was the very first of the Peppara dam oustees we met back in 2001. Popularly known as ‘Konankani’ as he usually walks about in a loincloth, he is obviously feared and respected even now. He must be over

eighty; his wife Maathi died many years back. He has five children, three daughters and two sons. He stays with his son, Radhakrishnan and his wife Usha with their two children. He is stone deaf, but can guess what our questions would be and talks coherently and analytically.

Mallan Kani once had a hearing aid donated by someone which got spoilt. He has only one eye, the other one was plucked out by a bird of prey when as a boy he tried to steal the bird's chick.

The story Mallan Kani narrates has two parts, one part till the dam and displacement and the second part, life after the uprooting. Mallan and his family had stayed further down in Chemmankala. There they had cultivated all crops and had lots of jackfruit, tubers, bananas and fish. In his inimitable way he narrates what a rich and healthy life it was.

The dam was supposed to have been built in Plankudy in which case many more tribal hamlets including Chathancode and Chemmankala would have got submerged totally. Ten tribal elders (Moottukanis) under the leadership of Mallan had gone on an agitation against the choice of the dam site and had succeeded in shifting it to Peppara. As the dam got completed in record time and the Kanis were asked to move, some of them under Mallan's leadership started resisting. Cash compensation up to Rs.12,000 was offered for crops and houses lost. They were offered 2.5 acres of 'land of their choice' per family and financial support for house construction and cultivation.

*" I don't need your money. I don't need the land that you offer even if you allow me to choose it,"* Mallan told the authorities. The Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) which built the dam was supposed to purchase forest land from the Kerala Forest Department (KFD) and resettle the Kanis. The land which was initially identified was at Pattankulichapara, which is on the side of the road from Vithura to Peppara. Later it was decided to resettle them at Podiyakkala, 3km. east from Pattankulichapara.

Two families under the leadership of Mallan and his uncle Bhagavan Kani cleared forests further upstream of Chemmankala and settled there. First there were only two families, but now there are twelve and Mallan Kani is the Moottukani.

The last time we met him he had just completed building all on his own an erumaadam (tree top shelter) in place of a previous one which was pulled down by an elephant, luckily while he was not on top. *" It was a bit too low and the elephant once had even reached up with his trunk and shaken it playfully and later remained around playing hide and seek with me. It was all dark and misty and I being partially blind and totally deaf couldn't see where he was nor hear where he went"*.

He was weeding and tending the crops in his piece of land which had signs of heavy trampling by wild elephants. *"Elephants are the biggest menace in the changed landscape. I had managed to get electric fence for Chemmankala which is the area most frequented by elephants. But only the Chathancode settlement on the other bank of the river got the facility"*.

He is a sad man. The degradation of forests and the disempowerment of his people who are giving up the old ways, especially of agriculture, pain him deeply. *“Unless we get over our laziness and start protecting our crops from wild animals by staying awake at night, we are all going to starve and die,”* he says vehemently. And that is exactly what he is doing. He had gathered firewood to lug up his tree top shelter for the fire for warmth in the chilly winter nights. He would do it all alone before nightfall and would be up. This time he had taken care to build the tree house on a taller tree beyond the reach of elephants.

*“I am an Arayan,”* he says. *“Not an Adivasi or Scheduled Tribe. The Thiruvithamkoor Maharaja had long ago given us the right to be the ‘Arasar’ (Rajas) of the hill forests. There were 86 Kingdoms in Kerala – Thiruvithamkoor, Kochi etc. And there were four races of Princely people who had the power and knowledge - Malayarayans, Kadalarayans, Ottarayans and Nattarayans. We are the Malayarayans, Kings of the mountains. Kadalarayans are the fisher folk along the western coast. Ottarayans are the ‘Velars’ who work with the earth and make terracotta utensils by baking the soil. Nattarayans are those who rule the plains. Everyone respected this system. And so we could live freely and peacefully in the forests. We used to visit the Maharaja once every year and take offerings (‘Kanikka’) of forest items – honey, ivory, special bananas, civet pods etc. And we were treated like Kings and given grand feasts thrice daily and gifts of clothes when we went to meet the Travancore Maharaja”.*

Along with their recent history he talked philosophically of the story of life and man through aeons. *“We have been created by the Brahmavu. Not only we, but also all life on earth. Only those who are created by Brahmavu can go back to Mother Earth because our bodies are made out of the soil (‘Mannudambu’). The things the Velars create by baking the soil can go back to the soil only if they are first powdered. But we dissolve in our mother straight away. We are made of Her”.*

*“All this may seem silly to you learned people. I am an illiterate man. I didn’t read these in any book. I am saying this from my memory. But it is a story of thousands and thousands of years... After every aeon, Brahmavu would put a ring inside a well. There are millions of rings in the well. Who can count them?”*

He talks of many Range Officers, Foresters, Forest Guards, and also a gate watcher of Peppara dam who had played critical roles in the displacement and resettlement measures in Peppara. Most of the stories and his descriptions are hilarious and often uncomplimentary to the personalities he mentions. But he is child like in his innocence and is totally detached from spite and bitterness.

He is aware of the importance of the Peppara reservoir as the water source of lakhs of people in the Thiruvananthapuram city and suburbs. He also knows that the dam’s lifespan has been tremendously reduced by the disastrous landslides of 1992 and heavy soil erosion in the catchment area of the reservoir. His opinion is that check dams should

be constructed in the streams feeding the reservoir and soil conservation measures undertaken to prevent further siltation.

### **Vilwan Kani – The One Who Is No More**

*“Our land had the presence of a Goddess once. Now it is all ugliness and evil”.*

We used to meet him often in the late 1980s, a happy old man with strong views and even stronger principles. He had shared his anguish about the destruction of the forests of the Karamana basin. He had opposed the dam and later the clear-felling of the whole area to plant eucalyptus. He was in the forefront of the resistance against spraying pesticides in the eucalyptus plantations immediately around the reservoir. He had both the analytical and the intuitive understanding of the ecological and social problems the Kanis were facing.

*“Our land had the presence of a Goddess once. Now it is all ugliness and evil all around with the artificial reservoir and the eucalyptus which are sucking the land dry,”* he used to say.

Vilwan Kani used to tell us about the floral wealth of Agasthyamalais, the wealth of rare and threatened wild flowers, the diversity of medicinal plants and the endemic trees, not found anywhere else. He would describe the various tubers, fruits, mushrooms, the wide variety of honey which used to give them food and strength, health and a long life. He had told us about their skill and love of hunting and the rituals they used to practise in hunting wildlife. They have a taboo against consumption of beef and milk. Buying ‘butchered meat’ was also looked down upon.

Vilwan Kani had described the several varieties of traps, bows and arrows, country guns they had used to hunt a variety of animals and birds. Rats, mouse deer, barking deer, giant squirrels, monitor lizards and Nilgiri langur are their most favourite animals. They love the meat of jungle fowl, pigeons and many ground dwelling birds.

Vilwan Kani was one of the last to shift to Podiyakkala. He did not take the meager money compensation offered to him, nor did he try to grab land as many did at that time. His wife testifies that they have just 50 cents of lands right now divided among the eight children they have.

Even after shifting to Podiyakkala, Vilwan Kani used to roam about in the forests, trapping, fishing, collecting tubers and honey and holding on to an old bygone way of life. He did not live long in the changed circumstances and was buried in a small piece of land in Podiyakkala in 1989.

## **Bhagavan Kani – The Moottukani of Chathancode**

*“Kanis can survive only if there are forests. EDCs should be strengthened for our survival and for the protection of the forests”.*

Bhagavan Kani is a fair, gentle, yet strong Kani known to all who have a call of the Agasthyamalai Mountains. He is friend, philosopher and guide in those forests and would have taken thousands of nature lovers to the waterfalls and peaks of those unique mountains. He was one of the Kani elders who had fought against the displacement at Peppara and demanded for just compensation and land for land. His land at the edge of the reservoir in Chathancode was not submerged but they were asked to move.

*“It was a humiliating and sad experience to be thrown out of one’s land. But we obeyed and shifted further higher in the catchment of the reservoir. Most of the families were driven off to Podiyakkala. There was no planned or systematic effort to allot land and rehabilitate the people in a just way. They were just made to look after themselves. We have always fended for ourselves, but those were better times when we had the freedom to choose the land to settle down and cultivate. But at Podiyakkala, within two years, the Forest Department people surveyed the area and the boundaries of the Kani settlement were fixed arbitrarily. The Wildlife Sanctuary laws restricted all our activities and we permanently feel threatened and insecure. It is as though we are committing some crime all the time. But we are only somehow trying hard to survive. Don’t we even have the right to live?”*

Bhagavan Kani and his wife Eachi have six children, two daughters and four sons. Two of his sons are community leaders, and one daughter works in the Anganavady. His son Mallan is the President of the Chathancode EDC and is a temporary forest watcher.

*“The Forest Department till recently used to give fire watcher jobs to us for two or three months in an year. We were also given the job of clearing the trek path to the Pochanithooval waterfall and to the Agasthyarkoodam. But this year they have not given a single job to us anywhere. They do not let me take tourists to the waterfall anymore. They are sending their own watchers who cheat the tourists and let them litter the place with plastics and bottles, destroy rare plants and even set fire to the forests. We used to be very strict in these things and never used to take too much money. But we are denied even this meager opportunity to earn some money and do service to the people and forests”.*

Bhagavan Kani believes that the EDC should be strengthened and supported to help the Kanis and protect the forests. *“The thing is that if things are done through the EDC, the forest officials will not be able to make money out of these programs. We know how to live in the forests without destroying it. We should also be given training classes to make a living out of forest protection and regeneration of NTFP”.*

## **Bhagavan Kani – The Elder**

*“Who can compensate our loss? We are forest people”.*

He is a gnarled ancient looking man with knotted hair ('Jada') and thin long beard. We used to meet him at Chemmankala in his home. We could always hear him working in his iron smithy in his quaint little reed hut on the slope of a hillock before we actually see him. He looks like a Sanyasi from another age. Although weakened by age, his once agile and strong physique is even now evident. His large eyes and ear lobes make him look regal. He will always welcome us heartily in to his work area which is his living room cum sleeping quarters cum cooking area cum store room. He will be working on a piece of iron making some implement. There would be knives of all sizes and shapes with perfect handles made of a woody climber (liana) around the smithy. His iron smithy is simple. There is the bellows, a mud mount surrounded by ash and embers. He will be blowing on the embers. There would be scrap metal all around and some boxes with tools. Part of his house is a temple and when we met him first he was on penance in preparation for a climb to the Agasthyarkoodam, their sacred peak. We couldn't imagine how such an old and weak man could make it to the peak. But he made it and the next time we met him after two months he was on yet another penance. He was busy making a temple for all the powers he worships in a grove of large trees. Underneath each tree he was sculpting on stone, images of Gods from Sun to Moon, Brahma to Wind and the Goddess Earth. In between he was collecting cashew in an innovative handbag carved out of an old discarded plastic bottle!

It is difficult to ask specific questions to him, as he is stone deaf. But he would make very intelligent conversation. He told us of the many people who still come to him to give orders for knives, of the way an elephant visited his hut one night, shook it thoroughly, ate the ashes from his fireplace and walked away. He didn't hear the elephant, nor did he guess what caused the upheaval when his hut shook and dust and pieces of thatch fell down. *“I am not afraid. Why should I be? If Ganapathi Swami wants to take me away, let him”.*

Bhagavan Kani's narrative was mostly of their history from the beginning of Earth Mother to Parasurama and to the Peppara dam displacement. *“The first spark of life was given by 'Bhooma Devi' (Earth Goddess). God of Air and God Brahma were the only forces in the very beginning. Later came Agasthyar Swamy and reclaimed this part of the earth. Much later when Parasurama threw his axe and reclaimed Kerala, there arose a fierce argument between him and Agasthyar”.* He goes on to say how rich in biodiversity this part is even now. He gives all credit to this richness to Agasthyar Swamy who had deep knowledge of the biota and commitment to its conservation. *“Nowhere in the world there would be as many tree species as in the Agasthyamalai area. It was a paradise of flowers. Flowers were everywhere, so many varieties”.*

*“It was Agasthyar who measured, classified and allotted ('Mannum padivetty, illom thillom thirichu') land to each Kani family. We are the people of Padmanabha Swami. This forest once was full of deer. Once we killed a deer and as our custom we divided it.*

*Those who took the head became the people of 'Thala illom'; those who took the legs became the people of 'Kalillom' – thus we were given our respective 'illoms'. Now deer is found only in the zoo and we are not allowed to hunt any more". He laughs. "Now its all Sivam – the age of total destruction".*

From the day he heard about the Peppara dam and the threat of displacement, Bhagavan Kani was against it. He resisted it strongly. *"I did not want any compensation for the land and life we lost. I will not accept money for the land where I belong. One official secretly told me, 'You, Kani, go up the hill wherever you want. You are after all a Kani Mooppan"*. That is how he ended up clearing forest in Chemmankala and settling down with his family.

*"Who can give us compensation for what we lost – the rich land and forests? When elephants and wild boar destroy our crops, how can anybody compensate the loss? We are forest people. How can we have a life detached from the forests?"* Bhagavan Kani asks poignant questions and abruptly stops, turns to his grand daughter (who was guiding us that day) and asks her why she didn't go to school and where her mother has gone. She is eager to make him show us all his assets, all his knowledge. As he talked and we listened, her pride and respect for him was obvious. But would she want to follow the same stream and even if she wants to, could she live in two different worlds? One day she made him show us his simple but ingenious matchbox made of a small piece of bamboo with the pith of a palm inside, a small stone and a piece of metal to rub together and the ember that gets caught in the pith inside. In no time there is a fire inside the little box. He has also innovated a plastic lid with which he seals the matchbox. She also showed us the sacred musical instrument 'kokkara', a serrated iron cylinder with a metal handle that is to be rubbed on the cylinder to make background music for their sacred song of history and lore ('Chattu pattu'). Even now he gets orders to make a 'kokkara' now and then.

His daughter Vasantha remembers vividly their life before displacement. She told us that they were in Kalimukhom Kani settlement which got partially submerged. However they were forced to leave as their agricultural land got submerged and they were cut off with water all around. Bhagavan's wife Eachi is suffering from partial paralysis and loss of speech. He has seven children, four daughters and three sons. Except one, all his progeny are in Chemmankala, but he prefers to stay alone in his hermitage.

Bhagavan Kani lives in his own world with his Gods and tireless work in the land and in his iron smithy. His children all have grown up, one boy, Krishnankutty is in the army. One is a self styled artist. Another son has a beautiful reed hut on stilts which he lends out to friends and tourists who want a taste of the beauty of the old life. The daughters, except one are married and obviously have retained some of the strength and ethnicity of true Kani nature in them in spite of the onslaught of massive changes in their ecological and cultural foundations.

## **Mallan Kani – Moottukani of Podiyakkala.**

*“It was a beautiful and harmonious life in the forest. Who knows where the forest ends and the farmland begins? It was all merged into each other”*

A grand old man, still tall and handsome, a gentle smile on his face, eagerly talking, but not so coherent. He is Mallan, the Moottukani of Podiyakkala.

*“I don’t know my age but I know that I was around 15 years old when Koyithampuran visited us to enquire about the murder of six Kani men. So I must be very very old. I mean something, but when I try to talk, I say something else entirely different”. But still he could tell us clearly how things were once upon a time. How there was truth and justice and how everyone used to be honest and keep their word.*

*“Today I have only sorrow and a deep sense of hopelessness. Formerly our settlements did not have any boundary. We used to move through the forests with our shifting cultivation cycles. We used to cultivate for three years in one place and move off and let forests regenerate in the area. We would choose a suitable place, clear the understorey of the forests and sow our seeds. We would plant perennials like jack, mango, cashew, breadfruit etc. and also a variety of food crops like paddy, several millets, maize, tapioca and other tubers. We had several paddy varieties, both wetland paddy and dry land paddy. Muthikkary, ramathy, chennavella, kooran, ayapperumal, kamadevan, maruthampoovu, uppittachennellu were the varieties of dry land paddy (‘karanellu’) that we used to cultivate. Chorady, pazhamoodu, Aryan, ponnaryan were the most preferred wetland paddy varieties”.*

*“We used to cultivate ragi, small millets (‘chama’, ‘thina’ etc.), gingelly, sorghum, maize etc. in forest land during our shifting cultivation. We had brought seeds of a number of varieties of dry millets, paddy, pulses etc. here also. But they didn’t come up well. They need good soil. Only in our old shifting cultivation soils, the traditional varieties come up. They need ‘puthukad’ (new forest soil)”.*

*“It was during 1980-’84 that the Forest Department started strongly restricting our shifting cultivation. The Forest Department measured the land, put boundary cairns (‘janda’) and forced us to settle down in plots of land allotted to us. ‘Jandas’ came up everywhere in the forest even in the middle of our agricultural land. In 1980 when the dam started coming up we were a large family, all staying together and collectively managing the 30 acres of land we had. We had both wetland paddy and dry land where we cultivated paddy, dry cereals, tapioca, vegetables, chillies etc. We had 10 acres of wetland paddy (‘kandam’). We would cultivate tapioca, paddy and other crops for three years and leave jack, mango and other fruit trees to grow. Then we would move to some other area. This area will be chosen with care. Often it will be only after 20-25 years or more when we come back to an area which we had cultivated for two years or so and left. By then a sort of a forest would have grown there, the land would have become fertile again and we would start our cultivation once again there”.*

*“It was a beautiful and harmonious life in the forest. Who knows where the forest ends and the farmland begins? It was all merged into each other in a mosaic of a very viable and efficient farmland. Today it is all gone. I am sad”.*

Mallan’s was the last family to leave Cherukad, one of the hamlets which went under water. He stood with the other families fighting against displacement till the last. *“But we were forced to leave at last while the waters started rising and we were threatened by the authorities that we may not get any land if we did not move”.*

*“ They gave us the word but they did not keep it,”* he said repeatedly. *“Where has truth gone in this world?”*

*“Even now our land has not got totally submerged. There are cashew trees, mango trees and jackfruit trees there. But we are not permitted to go back or take the fruits. It is all part of the Sanctuary. Those who go against rules and harvest the fruits destroy the trees in their hurry and greed. That is how the system has managed to corrupt the Kani also”.*

According to Mallan Kani, 42 families were displaced by the dam. Most of them were directed to settle in Podiyakkala on their own without much compensation. *“Those who came first or those who were close to the PHED or the Forest Department got more land and good land. We came last. We waited till the reservoir was filled three fourth. We got only about Rs.6,000/- as compensation for the crops and house we had. Actually I didn’t take any money from the authorities. My grown up sons however with a lot of humiliation in their minds received the money. Anyway it was not enough for anything when we shifted here and somehow settled down”.*

Obviously Mallan Kani got the steepest land in Podiyakkala most unsuitable for agriculture. He did not get any house either. One of his sons lives in a house built by the Panchayat and the other in a reed hut. They also have planted rubber.

*“I am totally against rubber in our land. My sons, against my wish had planted the seeds of natural rubber and the trees were growing well. Then recently the Rubber Board people came and forced us to cut all the rubber and plant budded rubber for which they give subsidy. This is an obnoxious tree which necessitates the removal of all our fruit trees, tubers, dry paddy. Nothing grows in its shade and anywhere near it. Can we drink rubber milk?”* He laughs.

He traces his long history of movement, along with the shifting cultivation and also forced by the invasion of outsiders in to the Kani area. *“I was in Panniankad when I was a child. From there the family moved to Mlappara and then to Theviyarkunnu. It was from there that we shifted to Cheriad with a number of families, only to be displaced by the dam to Podiyakkala. There were several other villages which were also inundated – Kundiri, Kalima, Pruthikuzhi being a few”.*

According to Mallan, Podiyakkala is a place they would never choose either to settle down or cultivate. *“It is a pit-like place closed on all sides. They should never have*

*selected this area for settling us. And we should not have agreed to come here. When we came here first it was reed forests and dry grasslands. We have a tough time cultivating in this land”.*

Mallan’s wife Payi passed away eight years ago. He had met her long ago when he went to Vellanikkal near Attingal to attend some festival. There were just seven Kani families there at that time and the rest were people belonging to the ‘Velar’ community. Only one Kani family, that of Payi’s younger sister remains in that area now. He had brought Payi along back home as his wife. He has three sons, Mallan, Mathan and Saikumar and one daughter, Mathi. Mallan is at Njaraneeli and the others are at Podiyakkala. Mallan’s father was a Moottukani.

*“The dam was first planned to be built at Alumplangudy, but later the dam site was shifted to Peppara under our pressure, where the Thodayar (Kuttiar) and Velliar joins to form the main Karamana River”.*

*“There is some river fish in the reservoir. But it is difficult to catch. Before the dam killed our river, we used to get lots and lots of hill stream fishes. Now it is all gone. The common varieties were ‘kallangari’, ‘kariyida’ etc. We used to use ‘choondal’ (line) or ‘kodamba’ (trap) or ‘ottal’ (basket) to catch the hill stream fishes. We never used to have nets. It cannot be used in the river and on principle it should not be used. But to fish in the reservoir we need to have nets. They have released Cutla, Tilapia etc. in the reservoir. Actually we are prohibited from fishing, as it is a Wildlife Sanctuary. But we do some fishing with or without their knowledge”.*

## **The Old Women of Peppara**

### **Parappi**

*“My heart is heavy whenever I think of my land. I have never gone back there. It will break my heart”.*

A tiny old woman, Parappi was sitting on a rock out crop near a drying up stream coming from a eucalyptus plantation when we first interviewed her. A few boys were pelting stones at a small mango tree. It was late evening and there was the threat of a storm in the sky. Women were coming back home from their daily routine of weeding in the newly planted rubber which was coming up everywhere in Podiyakkala. One could still hear the sound of branches of wild trees and even fruit giving mango and jack trees being felled or lopped to give way to the upcoming rubber.

She smiled at us as we walked up to her and sat down beside her. And she started talking. It was as though she knew what we wanted to hear from her. *“Before the dam, before we shifted here, we were at Mlappara. It was a heaven on earth,”* she started. *“We never knew what poverty was while we were there. There was always plenty to eat, plenty to distribute to the needy and there would still be something left to sell”.*

*“We had three ‘kandam’ (plots) of wet paddy land. We used to cultivate enough rice to last for an year. We had at least 2.5 acres of good land where we grew all crops, both food and cash crops. We had coconuts, jack and mango trees, tamarind, tapioca, banana, ginger, turmeric, pepper, vegetables – whatever we needed we had. And there were also wild plants we could consume. You know ‘kalanja’ (cycas) whose fruits we would process to get delicious and soft flour to make all sorts of eatables. There were wild tubers in the forest, many delicious and nutritious varieties. And there was fish in the river and honey. It was a luxurious life”.*

*“There was a rumour that we will be shifted from there and that a big lake was coming that would fill the whole valley. But I never really believed it. Then the tribal elders went on an agitation against our displacement. I also took part. With our ‘choondamvillu’ and ‘kallu’ (sling bows and stones) and fire in our hearts, we held several protest marches. One ‘satyagraha’ lasted for 29 days. We fought till the very last. We didn’t leave our land till the waters started rising and destroyed all that beauty and wealth”.*

*“When the waters reached our hut, there was nothing else to do but to take out our bamboo raft and set sail. We gathered whatever was possible to load in the boat and rowed...”* She stopped at that point lost in her sad thoughts, a sorrow deeper than the reservoir. But it was only for a moment. The next moment she became alert and enthusiastic.

*“Here we have settled like beggars. And there is so little food in the dry plantations of the Forest Department all around us. This is a place where our uncles had done shifting cultivation long ago. But no one settled here. We used to cultivate lots of food grains, ‘chama’, ‘kora’, ‘cholan’, ‘muthira’, ‘ellu’... We used to collect a lot of material from the forest – honey, medicinal plants, dammer, tubers and so on”.*

*“There are many women who would go up the hills along with men to collect forest produce. But I have never gone. I never had to. We used to take all our produce to Kallar ‘Chantha’ (market) which used to be a very big market place where all the Kanis, Sambavas and others would bring their diverse produce. It was a real big market of forest products”.*

*“My heart is heavy whenever I think of my land now under water. In summer when the reservoir water recedes, my children go back there to see the remnants of our hamlet reemerging. They go fishing in the reservoir and in search of some work in the forest. But I have never gone back. It will break my heart to see the valley gone, to see the houses drowned, the streams all flooded and slushy... No I will never go back”.*

While we parted she offered us the mangoes the boys had brought down and said she would love to meet us again and talk of the old times. We thought we would come and meet this grand old woman with betel leaves and tobacco soon one day.

Somehow we did not go back to her house soon. Later we came to learn that Parappi passed away quietly leaving not only her children in grief, but also the other old women of Podiyakkala sad and lonely. Obviously this old old Kanikkari was a source of strength to the women who stood together in their loss and grief. Her husband Mathan is still alive, but despondent and bedridden. She has four children.

### **Bhagavathy**

*“Once we used to go from hamlet to hamlet with our seeds. Now we are forced to pound our seeds and eat it”.*

Her daughter, Aruvi (Sujatha) introduced us to Bhagavathy one day saying she will tell us the whole story. She being one of the oldest matriarchs right now in Podiyakkala, I too sought her time and friendship eagerly. She said she is actually older than Parappi whose death seems to have rattled her., She said she does not know her age, but looks only around 70. She is warm and cheerful, at the same time bitter and contemptuous of the government officials, especially the Forest officials (whom she calls ‘kadanmar’, most probably meaning ‘guards’). She has two daughters, Aruvi forsaken by her husband has a daughter studying in the 7<sup>th</sup> standard (twice failed) and Parappi who is mentally challenged is married to Raman Kani.

Bhagavathy believes that she is a true Kani – ‘Malankani’. *“We are Arasanmar (Kings), Kings of forests. The Travancore Maharaja had conferred this title to us. Now in the new system, we have been reduced to Adivasis. Even last year I had gone to the Kowdiar palace to see the Maharaja. The Maharani (‘Rayathi’) gave us clothes and vessels. We were treated to a grand feast,”* she said proudly.

*“The Malankanis are a people on the move, not only because of our shifting cultivation cycles but also because of the pressure of plainspeople which forces us to move and shift more and more in to interior areas. This is the seventh settlement I have lived in my life. In the beginning we were at Panniangad and then we shifted to Kaithakkaparambu and then to Mlappara. From Mlappara we shifted to Deviarkunnu and from there to Cheriad. But never before in any settlement I have felt so insecure, unsettled and impoverished like here in Podiyakkala where we have been forcefully settled without any basic survival resources or rights”.*

*“At Cheriad, we had paddy lands and dry land cultivation. We had several varieties of paddy, some good for making ‘avil’ (beaten rice), some good for drinking as ‘kanji’ (gruel), some medicinal and some that mature at Onam time. Our tapioca varieties were well known – Cherumaru, Vellamaru, Manjakotta, Kozhippoovan. We also had several varieties of tubers”.*

Bhagavathy would often relapse into sad memories. *“We used to constantly move. But every time we shifted, we would take our seeds. Now it is all gone. It is all rubber everywhere. And whatever we try to grow is taken by the elephants and the wild boar.*

*We are facing the sad fate of being forced to eat the seeds. Even if we sow, we don't get anything to eat”.*

Bhagavathy is bitterly angry about the corruption and inefficiency in the Government Departments. She feels PHED was better than any other official department as far their life is concerned. *“At least they bought some land, built a few houses and settled us at Podiyakkala. But the new Ecodevelopment Committee is useless. The big forest officials came and promised all sorts of things, including houses with tap water and electricity, roads and schools and all other conveniences. But in the end they dumped a few banana culms and went away. They even promised to give us fertilizer and subsidy for planting. But years have passed by. Some of the banana culms grew and gave us bunches of fruits, but no further help came from them”.* She is bitter about the whole Eco Development Programme. *“It is a useless project which is meant only to cheat us further. We have no trust in them. The programme benefits only a few fellows who are close to the foresters and who forever are reporting against us to the officials. This is what is wrong with our people. We don't want our community to flourish. We're only bothered about our own petty short-term interests”.*

Bhagavathy is sure that in her life she will have to face yet another eviction. Six to seven houses will be submerged when the height of Peppara dam is increased and all shutters closed. *“This year they had closed the shutters and the water level rose. There was submergence of forests all along the edge of the reservoir and water had crept up all the streams and submerged valley forests making the whole place dangerously slushy and marshy. I am sure they did this to test the strength of the dam and see how much more water can be stored in the reservoir”.* She is bitter that the authorities treat them like dirt. *“They wouldn't let us have a proper road, they wouldn't let us live in the forest either. Even if we try to somehow live in the forest, the elephants and wild boar destroy all our crops. They have really put us in a jail”.*

## **Kali**

***“It is all rubber now. The fertilizer that we apply for rubber makes even our tapioca bitter”.***

A small made woman full of energy and warmth, we had met her one afternoon while she and her daughter were coming back from the forest with a shovel and a sack on her head and a round dark piece of termite mount on her hand. She stopped abruptly to enquire from where we came and why we were there. She looked tired and starved and her daughter weak and prematurely old. The hardships and sorrows of her life were evident on her face and emaciated body. But the smile she gave us and the enthusiasm with which she opened her sack and showed us the wild tuber ('neduvan') were heartwarming. The thin long tubers were so few and obviously wouldn't be enough for a meal for the two of them. They would have had to search far and wide in the degraded forest and dry eucalyptus – acacia plantations to spot the creeper and dig deep into hard earth to get at the tuber. The termite mount, she said, was for her hen and chicks. She happily posed for a photograph with the sack and shovel on her head.

It was a month later that by chance we met her at her house and thereafter the wide veranda in front of her house made with reed and reed leaf thatch as an extension of the house built by PHED became a place for us to hold our group discussions. Often we wondered why Kali who stays with her daughter Santha needs such a huge veranda. The original Kanikkudies deep in the forests usually have an open veranda with a fireplace where they spend most of the daytime and where most of them sleep with a fire going throughout the night. The concrete houses built for them by the government is just a two roomed 'match box', often used by them only to store their newfound material possessions.

It was only much later after meeting several women, widowed, deserted, unmarried, that we came to understand that Kali's veranda was a shelter for all of them. The women and children from all the women-only houses gather there in the evenings with their betel leaves and knives, trim and plate the reed slivers into baskets. Here they narrate to each other again and again their stories and sorrows. They start two or three small fires, share any food available, put the children to sleep and start weaving their beautiful reed baskets. There is a solar lamp to give them light and dogs to warn them of elephants and wild boar.

*"But when the charge in the solar lamp runs out and night darkens, we all sleep close to each other under whatever torn pieces of blankets and sheets available. Even the dogs go to sleep snuggling to our warmth, even wriggling under the sheets so that... when the elephant really comes, no one will be there to warn us. Our dogs are really obedient and well behaved,"* Kali states with irony and laughs.

Kali's husband, Madhavan Kani died four years ago. He was employed in the PHED till he died. Her son Rajan may get the job, but he is progressively going blind. She has two daughters also. Santha who is unmarried stays with her. Chandri who is married is at Njaraneeli.

*"We were at Pruthikuzhi which was just below Chemmankala when the dam came up. My family was originally in Chinnarumoodu and from there we shifted to Kaithakkaparambu and from there to Pruthikuzhi. Our family had more than five acres of land. We used to cultivate some other areas also when we were free to follow our shifting cultivation pattern earlier. We had four coconut trees, a number of arecanuts and pepper vines all of which used to yield a lot for our consumption and for sale. We had no wetland paddy but we used to grow dry paddy in the jhoomed area".*

Kali says she came to know what poverty and hunger was only after coming to Podiyakkala. *"I never had to go for any other work before getting displaced by the dam. For work in the forest coups, formerly we used to get only Rs. 3-4 per day. But our land and the forest would provide enough for our life. Now they pay per day Rs. 85/- for women and Rs.100/- for men. But nothing grows here and the forests are all gone under the dam and only the useless plantations remain".*

There are two main roads to Podiyakkala now from the Vithura-Peppara bus route. One of these is shorter and safer from Anjumaruthumoodu which is at least four km. from Peppara. The other is a longer road from near Peppara skirting the reservoir and winding through Acacia and failed eucalyptus plantations. *“We want the road from Anjumaruthumoodu made motorable. But the Kerala Forest Department is not allowing it. Life is becoming more and more impossible. We are now threatened by yet another uprooting. Now that we are just settling down, with the hope of a few rubber sheets giving us enough money to buy at least rice, the fear of one more displacement and destruction of all that we built up makes us insecure and helpless”.*

Kali explains to us how healthy and tasty the food from the forest is. *“The food from the forest protects us from all illness. It makes us healthy and energetic. But the rice and wheat we buy from the market are grown with chemical fertilizers and all sorts of poisons. Like you, we are also forced to buy these expensive items and feed our children. They get sick all the time. See, how thin and sickly these children are and incapable of doing hard work”.*

As we were talking to her, two men came out from the forest with bundles of reed on their head. *“They are ‘Parayar’, now called ‘Sambavas’. Only the poorest among them do reed collection from the forest now. They take pass from the Forest Department to collect reed. They are not actually allowed to collect from the Sanctuary. But how then can they live?”* Kali asked sympathetically.

*“Before the dam these people would come walking a long way to go deep into the forest to collect reed and cane. We would let them make sheds and stay in our land. After 3-4 days of collecting reed, they would tie them up into a raft and float down the river. But since the dam came, they have to come all the way here and take the reed as head load. If they are caught the forest officials would beat them up and that will be their end. We always protect them and let them collect reed. We never report about them to the heartless forest officials. Some of them are kind, but there are others who behave like cruel policemen”.*

*“After all they are also human beings. They have been living depending on reeds for hundreds of years. They never destroy forests, or cut huge trees or hunt wild animals. They never over-exploit reed. They have been struggling to live ever since I remember. We who had a better life are now impoverished to such an extent that we are also forced to cut reed, make baskets, mats etc. and sell them in the market. This is something which we’ve never done before. But like them we also don’t destroy the very resource upon which our life depends. Such a lot of invaluable forests are destroyed for dams or plantations. When they cut reed for the industries, they destroy the whole vegetation and nothing would be left. But only we poor people are punished for crimes we’ll never do”.*

Her humaneness and sense of justice is touching even though she herself is impoverished and has suffered injustice. When asked a personal question – how she is able to live, how she sees their future, she replies candidly. *“Oh, if there is work in the forest, we go for that. If there is something to be harvested from the land, coconuts, banana or pepper, we*

*sell them and buy rice. We all make reed baskets and take it to the market. If we are lucky, we may get Rs.60-100/- for the set of baskets of various sizes. If there is nothing else, we go to the forest to dig for 'neduvan'. Thus goes our life with all its ups and downs. Now our only hope is in rubber”.*

There are two Self Help Groups (SHGs) in Podiyakkala started by the Kudumbasree. Kali is a member of one of them. They meet in her veranda. *“There are 17 members and we have to give Rs.10/- each per week. We meet every week. But most of us are not able to pay even this sum”.*

Kali has studied at the Deviarkunnu School up to the 5<sup>th</sup> standard. But can only write her name, nothing else. She like all others hopes that rubber will be their saviour. *“We have to wait for four more years to start tapping. We had planted rubber seeds on our own in the 1980s. But the Rubber Board forced us to cut them all down and plant the budded variety”.*

Kali knows very well that life would never be as healthy and wealthy as it used to be. The rubber she knows will make them only poorer and force them to depend on food available in the market. She is sad that all trees had to be cut down to make room for rubber and that *“nothing good grows anywhere near rubber. The chemical fertilizers that we apply for rubber makes even our tapioca taste bitter”.*

*“But what else can we do?”* Kali asks sadly.

## **Aruvi**

*“Don’t we even have the right for a piece of land to bury our dead? ”*

I had met her sons, Aruviyan, Rajan, her daughter Parappi, but I missed her every time I went to Podiyakkala, as she would be in Chathancode with her second husband, Kalan Kani. We had met her late husband, Vilwan Kani several times before and after the construction of the dam. He was in the forefront of the struggle against the dam and displacement. He had refused to accept any compensation money and resisted shifting to Podiyakkala. That was in the late 1980s.

Aruvi looks young and behaves with aplomb, considering her to be the ‘Vilwathy’ – wife of the legendary Vilwan Kani, one of the last of the proud Kanikkar who had stood up against the destruction of Kani lands and ways of life. He was a strong man full of humour and warmth in spite of the sense of loss and anger he had in him at the injustice meted out to them. Aruvi was happy and touched to know that we are her late husband’s friends and that we had high regard for him. She welcomed us warmly and started narrating her life story without any preamble or hesitation.

*“They said they would give us everything except mother and father. But we got nothing except our bodies and our lives. Actually most of us were illiterate and true forest dwellers. We could not conceive of compensation for our submerged land or resettlement*

*plans. So it was easy for them to cheat us. They issued passbooks and cheques as meager compensation. But we were not given the cheque books because they said it will get eaten by termites and get destroyed in our huts. The cheque books are supposed to be kept in the Canara Bank at Parandod. We know nothing about it. Anyway my husband was against the displacement and did not believe in cash compensation for our land which was dearer to us than our lives”.*

*“We used to live on the bank of the big river. We had lots of cashew, at least 100 arecanut trees, coconut and all the food crops we needed. We had both marshland and also dry land. Every year we would cultivate wet paddy in the marsh and dry paddy in the slopes. We had at least four acres of fertile land. Forests were nearby and it was a rich and happy life. We had plenty of food and all the freedom to live as we please. Maybe we didn’t have money, but poverty and hunger were unknown to us. Our land was so rich”.*

*“44 families were uprooted from the Karamana valley. It was a terrible shock for all of us. Life changed overnight. From a happy and wealthy life, we were thrown to abject poverty. There wasn’t anything to eat, no clothes to wear. As my husband refused to take compensation, we didn’t have the initial capital to start life all over again”.*

*“By the time we reached Podiyakkala, all the good lands were already grabbed by our own people. I tried to clear some forests in the hilly area nearby, but my husband would not permit me. He made me come down to a little piece of plain land where we at last made our hut. We did not get any house constructed by the PHED or the KFD. We were left to fend for ourselves”.*

*Aruvi graphically described the strong resistance her people built up against the dam although finally they were forced to give up their struggle. “I remember six Kani elders who led the struggle against the dam. Two Mallan Kanis, Vilwan Kani, Mathan Kani, Bhagavan Kani and Govindan Kani were in the forefront. As they took the responsibility for the whole community, they were left high and dry. They got no compensation, nor did they get good land. But we should always remember them with gratitude because it was only they who saved us from total impoverisation”.*

*“I who had never known any difficulty in life had a tough time coping up with the drastic changes. We were very sad to leave our beautiful land at Chemmankala. Our land did not get submerged but we were evicted forcefully. The forest officials converted the whole area to plantations of all sorts of natural trees”.*

*Aruvi’s memories of her childhood and youthful years are vivid. “ I was around 12 years old when Vilwan Kani married me. I had studied up to the 5<sup>th</sup> class and even now know the 26 English alphabets. I know that I am capable of becoming a Government official. They don’t know anything more than me. I used to partake in ‘Kakkirissi Nadakom’ and Harischandran Drama (both folk dramas). I always took the lead role of the heroin Manjulangi and knew how to sing, dance, act and do all the martial art needed for those ancient dance – dramas”.*

*“I had ten children, two of them died when they were very young. Now there are four girls and four boys left. One of them, Aruviyan who was in Podiyakkala committed suicide a few months back. One girl is in Chemmankala and all others live at Podiyakkala”.*

*“I got only fifty cents of land which I had to divide among my eight children equally. In the end there was no land to bury my husband. He died 15 years back. We buried him in a small piece of land in between two plots of land. Now when I die, I will have to be buried on top of him. Don’t we even have the right for a piece of land to bury our dead bodies?”* Aruvi asks, not with any bitterness, but in a matter of fact way.

Aruvi described the several families who were displaced from Cheriad, Alinkizhi, Mlappara and Mannidinja Karikkakam. The way she described each one of the Kanis with the nicknames she has given them and their peculiar traits and idiosyncrasies were hilarious. Who among them was knowledgeable, who was capable, who good at witchcraft and other rituals, who all were near and dear to her... she would narrate to us honestly and frankly.

*“But now who is there? What is left? All gone for ever”,* she says sadly. *“After my husband’s death, I was a desperate woman. I built a tree house on a tall ‘Maruthi’ tree in Chemmankala and stayed there for one and a half years with my two youngest children. It was a war against the Government”.*

*“Don’t we have the right to put our dead on this Earth?”* She had asked. *“At last my husband’s younger brother, Kalan came to me and pleaded with me to allow him to give me a new life. I relented. Now I live here part of the time and go to Podiyakkala only to help my children tend the land and to see my mother who lives there all alone. My mother is the eldest of all Kanis. She must be 150 years”.* (Later she changed it to 110 years).

She is sad about the collapse of the old culture in the face of the silly modern entertainments like the Cinema and the TV. Kalan Kani is fond of her, but in a drunken brawl, he hit her in the face and she lost four of her front teeth. Aruvi’s biggest wish now is to put on false teeth, become young and beautiful again, *“So that I can talk to the officials again without shame; so that I can once again become Manjulangi in the Kakkirissi Drama. Will you help me?”*

## **Devaki**

***“Here we feel imprisoned. There is nobody to show us a way, how to live, what to hope for”.***

We saw her two years back for the first time. She was sharpening her knife on a stone near a dry streambed one afternoon. She had planted hundreds of rubber seedlings on a

steep slope. We talked to her while she cut down the last of the ‘weeds’ – all the reeds and other vegetation for her rubber to grow.

Devaki said she had only one daughter, Sheela, married and staying nearby. She had planted 161 rubber plants. *“We get subsidy from the Rubber Board for digging pits, applying fertilizers and also for weeding. I got Rs.6/- per pit. I cut down jack, cashew, mango and other wild trees to plant rubber. Now the land has become dry, a desert where nothing grows and that gives nothing for us to eat. But still I have great hope in rubber”.*

Devaki has planted 100 rubber saplings for her daughter also. She knows the stream they depend on for water will dry up when rubber grows up. Right now they take water from a well nearby. *“But we prefer the running water which is for ever purified by nature”.*

Devaki lives in a house built with subsidy from the Block. It cost Rs.35,000/-, built with sun dried mud blocks and cement blocks. The Gramasevak from the Block had helped her get it. *“We were in Cheriad when the dam came. I remember shifting from Deviarkunnu (near Pallippuram) to Cheriad. I was studying in the 4<sup>th</sup> standard then. We shifted to the hills (Cheriad) only because it became impossible to live among the plainspeople. Our land was getting encroached upon from all sides and there was tremendous pressure of all sorts on us from them. We were afraid of losing our culture, our women and our children’s character”.*

*“Cheriad was a heaven. There were lots of hamlets scattered but connected by familial and social bonds. We had lots of land. I cannot say how much as it was all family land and forest land all running into each other. It was a rich land, a rich life. We didn’t have wetlands for paddy (vayal) but had enough land to grow dry paddy, banana, vegetables, pulses, ginger, turmeric and so on. We also had coconut, arecanut, and cashew”.*

*“The forest used to give us lots and lots of tubers – Neduvan, Nooran, Nooli, Mukkizhangu, Nedunooli, Neduvanmattu, Kavala, Chengu, Pinnen etc. Now the best forests have gone under water. The Forest Department further destroyed the forests by cutting down valuable forests and planting with useless trees. In their forests, only wild boar can multiply. And they eat up all our tubers”.*

*“Of course one cannot blame them. They also are living things,”* She adds thoughtfully.

She takes us to the edge of the reservoir one day. They had filled the reservoir to the maximum level by closing all shutters. All along the periphery of the water body, trees stood submerged and dying. In the distance the Agasthyarkoodam peak loomed high. She showed us the creepers, the tubers of which are edible, and other trees and plants, both useful and wild.

*“In the summer when the water level goes down everyone goes fishing, even old women. We fish with long lines (‘choonda’) and also nets. Nets are prohibited. But we play hide and seek with the foresters and manage to catch something. Not much”.*

*“PHED had built 29 houses. They gave some families a few cows and goats once. The Vithura Panchayat built five houses and the Jilla Panchayat built five houses. There are many families who didn’t get any house during resettlement. I also got a grant from the Panchayat to build a house. I got Rs.12,000/- for which I had to beg and plead and knock at every door”. She somehow has managed to build a cute little house combining both the modern and traditional architecture.*

*“I have one daughter whom I brought up by doing daily wage work. She was good at studies and was prepared to walk more than 25 km. every day through forested hills and valleys”. Why only one child, I asked thoughtlessly. Suddenly her happy bright face clouded. “My husband Krishnan Kani died when my daughter was just two years old, leaving me all alone to face all the hardships in life. He was such a good and loving man. But now I don’t even remember his face... ”.*

Devaki is a member of the ‘Devi SHG’ which meets in Kali’s veranda. Saraswathy and Sreekala are in charge of the SHG. She is not sure whether they will ever have enough capital to start any venture. *“My daughter would like to start making pickles etc. from forest produce. But who will teach us how to do it? The only money I earn now is from the reed baskets we weave and a few forest items I collect like gooseberries. Even I am not able to deposit the weekly money in the SHG”.*

Asked about her opinion of the EDC, she became vehement. *“The Forest Department has a negative and non-co-operative attitude to us. They look at us as though we are criminals, forest destroyers. But what shall we do? We are also human. They would not permit us to clear a road. At the same time they control all our livelihood activities. They would not give us anything, help us in any way. They wouldn’t show us a way, how to live and what to hope for. Here we feel imprisoned, as though in a jail”.*

## **Radha**

***“We were not like this before. But after coming here we all feel threatened, insecure”***

Though her house is the first one as we enter Podiyakkala from via Anjumaruthumoodu, we were never able to meet her. Once she was away digging waterholes for elephants in the Sanctuary, other times she was weeding her rubber or had left for the market. At last when we met her she was cleaning chillies at her house and was in a mood to converse with us for some time. Unlike most other Kani women, Radha looked strong and determined, but at the same time somewhere broken and bitter. But when she talks, her honesty and intelligence resounds in her words.

*“I was in Attumpuram in my first husband Mathan’s house when the dam came. It was so beautiful an area, as the name indicates, on the banks of the river. Our settlement was*

*called Mannidinja Karikkakam. We had around ten acres of land. It was so fertile an area! One would get a good crop whatever one planted. We had all the crops and lots of fruiting trees like coconut, jack, mango, tamarind, cashew, artocarpus etc. Fruits from a single tamarind tree alone used to fetch us quite some money every year. We never knew hunger. Even if we sell some coconuts, we could buy enough rice. There was always food in every house. And we didn't have to go for any manual labor. We didn't have to depend on the forest officers for anything. I think 50 families were evicted for the dam from there".*

*"We got Rs.21,000 as compensation, one hectare land and a house. The PHED had at first earmarked 110 ha. of land for the settlement. But later due some objections raised by the Forest Department, it was reduced to less than half. Most of us came here on our own and settled ourselves peacefully in different plots of land like we used to do formerly without measuring the area. It was two years after we reached here that the Forest Department people came and constructed the boundary cairns for their Sanctuary area. They drew their boundary as they pleased and put their 'janda' even across our cultivated land. Thus we lost a lot of land which we had cleared and planted. Now people here have anything between 50 cents to a maximum of one acre only. Part of it is steep, rocky and uncultivable".*

*"I now live here with my second husband, Sasidharan Kani. We have 200 rubber saplings, some arecanut and banana. This is not a fertile area. We would never have chosen this area for settling. There is heavy destruction of our crops by wild animals. Only yesterday a sambar deer destroyed all the rubber saplings in one compound. Actually here all of us are starving most of the time".*

*"Whenever there is some coup work in the Forest Department, I go. I get Rs.85 per day. It is very hard work. Only healthy and strong men and women can do this. On an average we get five days of work a month. I also make reed baskets to sell in the market. Sometimes when there is no work, I go to the forest to collect gooseberries, roots of asparagus and so on. In our original place I never had to go for manual labor as I do now. I started going to the forest to collect forest produce only after coming here".*

*"I was born at Theviyarkunnu. I studied up to 8<sup>th</sup> at Aryanad school. I was abandoned by my first husband as I didn't bear him any children. I have a brother who is in Poovachal and a younger sister at Bharathannoor, a Kani settlement near Palod. My father died at Theviyarkunnu. My mother who came here remained unhappy and died here".*

By the time she reached this point in her narration, I asked how she conceives of her own future in the days ahead, what role she sees for herself in rebuilding the community. *"I am a member of the Chaitanya SHG. But most women are not even prepared to join the group. Some who are members do not have money to pay the weekly share. What is wrong with us is that we cannot remain united. I am not excluding myself. We were not like this before. But after coming here we all feel threatened, insecure. We feel constantly that we are in a jail".*

Radha has only sorrow and disappointment about the Ecodevelopment Programme of the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary. This programme which they all call 'Eco' started with fanfare and lots of promises from the side of the highest of forest officials. *"The Wildlife Warden promised 'anayum ambariyum' (elephant and the cushioned seat on it). I gave all support for the venture. For a time we believed that it will save us from penury. I became the first bank nominee. Binu Kumar was the first President of the Eco Development Committee (EDC). They said we would get water supply. We only asked for a culvert to be built and the road to Anjumaruthumoodu made motorable. Nothing happened. They gave us a few banana saplings. They built an office building for the EDC. You must have seen the shabbily built useless building that is not going to last even an year"*.

*"They cheated us. That is why we became hostile and negative to the Forest Department. I feel the forest staff are to be blamed. They do not make any effort to take us into confidence or gain our faith. Twelve people used to get fire watchers' jobs formerly. But now they give more than half the job to outsiders. I feel all should do the job of fire protection. We can at least take turns"*.

*"Actually we Kanis are also not on the right path. Only a few of us are negative. But they are able to make a lot of trouble and destroy everything. Some of them are ready to side with the Forest Department against the genuine interests of the Kanis. And naturally these selfish ones are made use of by the officials as spies. They will be made to exploit us and report any forest offence we may commit. I resigned from the position of the bank nominee after a few months. Even Binu Kumar resigned. Why should we suffer getting the blame from both our people and the forest staff? The forest officials should stop promising big things which they cannot fulfill for many reasons, may be even genuine reasons. They should instead try to do some small necessary things for this hamlet and regain our confidence... But I am not sure..., our people are also not willing to come together, to work together for a common cause. I am not excluding myself. I also lack the faith to become a bit selfless and co-operate for common good"*.

### **Swarni (Sulochana)**

***"It is now that I feel ousted from my real house and land. I feel lonely, incapable of doing hard work and have become a burden on everyone"***.

We had met her initially for a short while in the beginning of our survey. A fair, regal looking lady, a widow with three sons and three daughters. She seemed happy, healthy and free – constantly moving about among her children staying with whoever needed her. In the span of two years, when we met her last one of her sons' house at Podiyakkala, she had grown older, ill and sad. She had started feeling unwanted by her children with no place to call her own, no home where she belonged.

*"I grew up at Theviyarkunnu. My mother, Ammukutty is still there. I came to Cheriad after marrying Mathan. At Cheriad we had cleared forests as we pleased and taken for us a beautiful piece of land. We had 6-7 'kandam' (small terraced paddy fields) where*

*we grew wet rice. We had all other crops also. We had quite a lot of land in proportion to our large family. There were arecanut, tapioca, banana, jack and mango trees. There was always plenty to eat. But when we came here, our children were all very small. Mathan was always sick and incapable of taking even what was rightly due to us. So we ended up having less than an acre of land which you can see now. Most of it is rocky and not good for agriculture”.*

*“ I love to grow rice. I had brought seeds of a number of varieties of paddy from Cheriad. In the beginning we tried to grow paddy. We had grown lots of tubers also. But this place is a corridor for wild animals like elephants, wild boar, deer etc. which eat up all our food crops. So we are also forced to cultivate rubber. Now these ‘profit trees’ are all grown – rubber, coconut, arecanut, cocoa etc. and so the land is no more suitable for growing even dry land paddy. It is a pity. I feel very sad about it”.*

Of course we could see the narrow strip of valley land and the steep rocky land Swarni has got. Even the rubber saplings were in a bad state. There were only a few wild trees and even these badly lopped for the rubber seedlings to get enough sunlight. The valley is now full of arecanut, coconut and banana. *“This land is not suitable for cultivation. The house I got from PHED is given to my eldest daughter. One daughter is married to Podiyam. Two sons and their wives stay mostly at Chemmankala. Another son and daughter have built separate houses and are staying here itself. Actually this land is not enough for all of them to live,”* she lamented.

What has happened to the smart happy lady I had seen two years ago, who had talked to us proudly about her children who needed her, about her grandchildren who loved her? Now she feels like a refugee with nowhere to go. *“It is now that I feel ousted from my real house and land. I feel lonely, incapable of doing hard work and a burden on everyone. So I have given an application for a house and a piece of land to the Collector. I heard about the distribution of land to the landless Adivasis. I have been promised some land somewhere, but who knows when and how I will get it”.*

But where, and when and how long she has to wait and how far from her children she may have to go for a ‘land of her own’ and a ‘home to belong?’ Who knows?

### ***Family- wise Case Studies.***

**Kathiran Kani - Saraswathy.**

***“If we have to survive and progress we have to develop more co-operation among us. Every outside intervention... contributes only to disharmony and schism in our community”.***

Whenever we met them at their neat beautiful house at Podiyakkala, they were eager to narrate their story and express their views and perceptions about everything. Kathiran Kani has the physical features characteristic of his tribe and yellowish colour. Saraswathy is more vocal, obviously more educated and worldly. He earlier lived in

Cheriad, one of the submerged villages, and she is from Peringanmala, outside the Malankani area. She has studied in the Idinjar School. They have a baby son, six months old.

Kathiran Kani remembers having been called for the land survey for the dam. Only four or five people went. They would have to work from 8 AM to 5 PM for Rs.2-3/- for women and children and Rs.6/- for men per day!

*“I was 15 years old when I heard about the dam. At first they said it would be built below Theviyarkunnu at Moonnattumukku. There they would have had to evict a very large number of Kani families. They then considered building the dam at Alumthangi (Plamkudy). There was no rock in that area. So they shifted it to Peppara where the two rivers have already joined to form the main Karamanayar,”* Kathiran said.

Kathiran’s father is Mallan Kani and mother Mathi. Devaki incidentally is his sister. His mother passed away recently.

Kathiran and Saraswathy were very precise about the details of resettlement. *“The PHED had at first measured 110 ha. of land in Podiyakkala. They intended to give 2.3 ha. (5 acres) each for the 45 families evicted. But later when the Forest Department resurveyed the boundaries and put ‘jandas’ (boundary cairns) they cheated us of our promised land. They actually did not properly allot land to the families, nor did they specify boundaries. Most of the families did not get even two acres of land. No one got five acres. Only a few families who were close to the forest officials got good land. Those who came on their own to this place first also chose better land”*.

Kathiran Kani mentions a few names of Kanis who were formerly daily wage forest watchers who have got good land. *“Even now this sort of injustice and partiality on the part of the forest officials continue and create a lot of bad feelings among us”*.

Saraswathy though young had strong views about the changes in the social and cultural matrix of the Kanis. She was especially concerned about the dowry system coming to the Kani society. She is sure that displacement from their traditional land and traditional ways of life has also contributed to this change in their attitude to women and to material property in general.

*“Formerly we had only to give some money to the Moottukani for our functions like marriage, birth, death and so on. It was just a formality and not payment for him to perform certain rites and bless the marriage. But now Kani men are demanding even up to Rs.15,000/-, 15 sovereigns of gold, two acres of land and so on as dowry. A Kani family in Poovachal, related to Kathiran is being forced to give this kind of dowry for their daughter”*.

Saraswathy also talked of the intrusion of outsiders to this area. *“Our men are preferring to bring non-tribal girls as wives. Our girls who get educated settle outside and forget the Kani ways. The sad thing is that most of these inter-caste marriages end up in tragedy. There are at least three such broken families in Podiyakkala with children left as*

*orphans. This is also definitely a clear sign of cultural disintegration". Saraswathy and Kathiran Kani both feel the displacement from their forest homes has given them only insecurity creating greed in their minds and disrespect to the strict cultural and social norms they had in their community.*

Kathiran had undergone training in apiculture in Madras. The Kerala Forest Department also had given him training in bee keeping at Chathancode. *"We get Rs.40-50/- per litre of ordinary honey and Rs. 250/- for cheruthen (medicinal honey). The apiculture programme did not take off. We collect most of the honey from the forest. But for that one needs natural evergreen forests. All that has gone under water or destroyed in the name of plantation raising".*

Kathiran Kani and Saraswathy are both anxious about the economic well being of the Kanis. *"If we have to survive and progress we have to develop more co-operation among us. But every intervention, however well meant contributes only to disharmony and schism in our community. We are a divided people".*

Kathiran and Saraswathy are among the few couples who are not vehemently opposed to the Eco Development Programme of the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary. *"We have actively supported the programme from the very beginning. But we did not take up any position in the committee. It was the fault of a few forest officials that resulted in the destruction of the whole programme. They promised Rs.2,500/- per family for agriculture development. Instead they dumped 100 banana saplings on us. Many did not accept it. Most of the Kanis still refuse to join the EDC. Now it is said that we may have to repay the cost of the banana saplings. Only a few families have joined as members in the EDC. The forest officials actually are getting the signature of the tribal President of the EDC and doing whatever they please".*

They were pained by the unfortunate incidence (reportedly) of a forest official beating up a tribal youth two years ago which actually made everyone turn against the EDC. *"An elephant had died after drinking the 'wash' in an illicit liquor brewing shed. The forest officials employed the Kanis to burn up the elephant carcass. They promised to pay Rs.500/- per person. But in the end they left without even paying the charges for tea supplied from a shop run by a Kani youth, Sreekumar. He went to the officers to claim the cost of the tea and was badly beaten up by a forester. The man is still unable to do hard work. Meanwhile the news of the death of an elephant had come in some newspapers and the forest officials concluded that it was the Kanis who leaked the news which they naturally wanted to hide. This resulted in a lot of conflict and the whole community questioned the unjust acts of the officials. That year we were not given any firewatchers' job during summer by the Forest Department. We were so hurt that someone vengefully put fire to the forests resulting in more conflict and permanent enmity with the forest officials. This we feel is the most unfortunate thing that could have happened to us at this point of time".*

## Viswanathan - Savithry

*“The problem is that we are a divided people. And we are ignorant about our rights in this world”.*

Viswanathan Kani and Savithry had welcomed us warmly the very first day we met them to their house. They have added two rooms to the house PHED had built for them. They have two daughters, Sijy a student in the Lal Bahadur Sastri Institute of Technology staying in a hostel in Thiruvananthapuram and Lijy, who has completed SSLC and studying stitching at Njaraneeli. Apparently they looked contented with life and proud of their daughters.

Viswanathan Kani was brought up in Vinoba although his father owned land in Mlappara at the time the dam was constructed. Savithry is from Cheruppani near Vinoba. Both are educated up to SSLC from the Vithura School. Obviously it is their education and Savithry’s contact with the outside world that have given them the capacity to cope up with the modern world better than most others at Podiyakkala.

Both Viswanathan and Savithry were always keen to spend time with us putting aside the work they were doing in their neatly tended homestead. They also have planted rubber but their plot contained a variety of crops – coconut, arecanut, banana, tapioca, pepper, turmeric, a number of tubers etc.

*“41 families were settled in Podiyakkala”, Viswanathan said. “Now there are at least 70 families. Families have expanded. Married sons and daughters have been given plots of land and most of them prefer to live separately building their own reed huts. We call them ‘cherukudumbam’ (small family)”.*

*“We had around 14 acres in Mlappara. It was allotted land from the forest with proper boundary ‘jandas’. Two brothers owned the land. My parents were at Vinoba, which is actually my mother’s place. I was brought up in Vinoba. At Podiyakkala we got around one hectare. We got an amount of Rs1,300/- to start cultivation here. They did not give us any money to build temporary sheds when we moved in here. Actually money was allotted for that purpose in the Resettlement Plan. But the Water Authority people swallowed it up and neatly cheated us. We somehow managed to put up our own traditional hut and start living here”.*

*“The PHED actually built only 29 houses, that too after three years”. Savithry added, “All those years our only job was pestering them with our complaints and demands for justice. It was not as though they were giving us something out of charity. The whole resettlement scheme was incorporated into the Peppara Project”.*

Viswanathan is a very knowledgeable man, and hence a sad man. He knows the history of forest destruction in the Agasthyamalai area, and the injustice meted out to his people.

He talked about the pocket reserves in the Trivandrum forest area and the Kani settlements within them. The case of the beautiful Chooliamala is uppermost in his memory. *“The Forest Department illegally felled it totally and converted it to their silly plantations. Kani people who lived in the reserve lost their cultivated land and their resources. They were not given any compensation”*.

Viswanathan has a small well near their house with crystal clear water. *“We are lucky to have pure water near our house”, Savithry says. “But there are many families who depend upon the drying up streams for water. The Forest Department gave us three wells. There is just one Panchayat well. The ITDP dug three wells. But water is still a problem for many families”*.

Viswanathan is very bitter about the repeated broken promises they have had to suffer from the part of the authorities. *“We were promised good houses with toilets and running water, roads, school, health care, community hall etc. But so far the Block has just given a few toilets. ITDP gave assistance for eight houses. But only if one had some cash at hand and manpower for building, one can make use of this government assistance. That is why the poorest families among us still are without proper houses”*.

*“The Panchayat President never comes this way. Even when a Kani was the President, only his family prospered. The present President came here for the first time after being in power for three years only recently. The present Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) insists on holding ‘oorukoottam’ (people’s gathering). Ours was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2003. We discussed issues of house maintenance, the road to Anjumaruthumoodu, drinking water, agriculture etc. Everyone was clamouring for developing more cash crops like ginger, banana etc. Nothing more is known. Everyone has gone back to somehow finding a way to survive”*.

*“The problem with us is that we are a divided people. And we are ignorant about our rights in this world,” Viswanathan analyses their plight. “There is an S.T. Promoter for this hamlet. She is an educated tribal girl married to an outsider employed in the Postal Department. She is from Meenankal. She comes here sometimes, but she is not able to do anything for the community, nor influence us in a right way”*.

*“For example, our houses were built 22 years back and we have been requesting for funds to maintain them,” Saraswathy adds. “We had built an extension to our house on our own. Most of the houses here are in very bad condition. You must have seen two totally broken down houses on your way here. Luckily they did not fall on people and cause death or injury. We would need at least Rs.25,000/- for repairs. We will have to pay Rs.200/- per day for a labourer and bringing things here from outside will also cost much”*.

Savithry and Viswanathan have strong but mixed opinion about the ‘Eco’ programme. *“I am an EDC member,” says Viswanathan. “The forest officials including the Range Officer had come here to talk to us about the functioning of the EDCs. It was started four years ago. The then Wildlife Warden also came to meet us. He gave us a lot of false*

*promises. The trouble started there. The Moottukani's son, Saikumar is the present President of the EDC. The forest officials had said that there was three crore rupees earmarked for the EDC. But when the EDC was formed all were not included in the committee. Only some became active members. This itself caused a lot of problems. They promised Rs.2,500/- per family, good pepper saplings etc. but gave only a few banana culms. The Kanis started looking at the Project and all of us who are part of it with mistrust".*

*"Our settlement for the first time got divided on this issue," Savithry says sadly. "The 'Eco' gave some loan for buying cattle and goat. A building was constructed for convening meetings and for storing the forest produce we collect. We were given 100 banana saplings. Some of us refused to accept it. There was even a rumour that we may have to pay money to the Forest Department later when we sell bananas!"*

*"The problem is that we did not understand the real meaning or the concept of EDC," Viswanathan said. "No one explained to us what it is meant for. So we understood it in our own fanciful way. And even now it remains grossly misunderstood by the people for whom it is meant. It should have been explained to us that it is for the conservation of forest wealth and indirectly and ultimately for our welfare. That we have to co-operate with the functioning and we have to contribute our share also to the core fund is misunderstood by most. We are still not able to see it as our project. We look at it as yet another Forest Department's project meant to alienate us further from our only resources. A few of us may benefit by getting into the good books of the officials and by acting as spies carrying tales about the rest of us. But otherwise it is of no use to us. This is our perception about this 'useful' programme".*

*"The 'Eco' is actually not such a bad project. Given our support it sill can be made to become our own welfare project. Three wells were dug by the Forest Department with the EDC fund. Rs.5,000/- each was given to build 2 toilets. From the Block we get only a maximum of Rs.2,000/- for toilets. Actually those who got the assistance did not complete the construction of toilets. Through the EDCs, sick people get Rs.500/- as emergency assistance. I personally feel EDC is a good initiative". Viswanathan explains his point of view with all sincerity.*

*"The best thing about the 'Eco' is that there is no political interference. Those who are against it and antagonized by the activities are against some of the forest officials. There have been a few unfortunate incidents which have alienated the people from the forest officials. Because of this misunderstanding, most of us did not volunteer to go as fire watchers and the forest officials also are not keen to employ us".*

*"Our EDC had run a canteen at Attayar for the Agasthyarkoodam pilgrims for one year. We got a neat profit of Rs.60,000/-. It was a big success. We bought vessels for Rs.12,000/- that year. Now the Forest Department has allotted the canteen work to outsiders. This also has hurt our people and made them antagonistic to the Forest Department. We can actually act as ecotourism guides and make Rs.50 per day by taking tourists to scenic spots. But even this work is being given to outsiders".*

*“There are three EDCs in the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary – Podiyakkala, Bonaccord and Chathancode. The Bonaccord EDC maintained by the estate Tamil labor alone, I feel, is functioning properly. The Tamil labourers are cleverer than us and they get a lot of money from running the canteen and working as guides during the Agasthyarkoodam season. That is why the Bonaccord EDC has made profit. The EDCs in the Neyyar Sanctuary are also facing similar problems. It is the fault of the forest officials who promise a lot and later fail to keep their word. They think we are idiots and we will cooperate only if we are promised big things. This is wrong. We feel insulted when false promises are made”.*

*“The Forest Department employs four tribal fire watchers during summer months. They pay Rs.3000 per month to outsiders. But four tribals are asked to share the salary of two watchers. So we get only around Rs.1500 per month”.*

*“Our greatest problem now is from wild elephants,” Savithry adds. “They destroy all our crops. We know they also have a right to live. We never had any conflict with wild animals before we came here. But this place near an artificial water body attracts all wild animals. The wild boar especially destroys our tapioca and all tubers”.*

*“Electric fences are not effective,” says Viswanathan. “We should have proper trenches all around our settlements. It would be a bit costly. But it will be worth it and will surely solve the problem. We ourselves should take the responsibility of maintaining the trenches. We will have to have a 7.5 km. long trench. But some of our people are not agreeable to trenches. The Forest Department gives compensation for elephant depredation. But it is a laborious task to bring the officials here, convince them of the loss and claim compensation”.*

*“Are you asking how we are managing to survive?” Savithry asks me. “How can I explain? We do a number of things to keep starvation away. When there is work, we go as labourers. We fish, we collect edible tubers. We sometimes collect plant material for sale. Not through the EDC but we take it to the market. We collect ‘nellicka’ (gooseberries – *Emblica officianalis*), ‘pantham’ (dammer – *Vateria indica*), ‘sathavari’ (*Asparagus racimosus*), ‘ponnamboo’ (*Myristica malabarica*), ‘kodampuli’ (*Garcinia cambogia*), ‘padathali’ (*Cyclea peltata*), ‘pachottipatta’ (*Symplocos laurina*) etc. We sometimes get honey also. We have planted rubber also, but only in areas where we have no other crops. We got Rs.3,000/- as subsidy from the Rubber Board”.*

Savithry is the treasurer of the Vanitha SHG in her area. *“Our President is a Plus II from the Model Tribal Residential School at Katela. But our people do not know thrift or the benefits of saving. Any way we will try to do our best and increase the economic well being of the women folk,” she said. “Seventeen women have joined the SHG. Our membership fee is Rs.40/-. We have to pay Rs.10/- per month. We meet every Sunday. It is only three months since we started. Only after six months can we think of taking a loan and starting some venture. A person from Memala (a coordinator of SHGs came and told us all about Kudumbasree and women’s self-help groups”.*

Savithry and Viswanathan feel that Kanis need not only money but also security in life, especially food security and self-sufficiency. *“We do not have much party politics among us. That will only divide us. There is no religious conversion either. As it is, the work of the ‘Adivasi Maha Sabha’ is good. But when money comes, trouble starts. Even we who live in the forest, who believe in truth, get easily corrupted”.*

Savithry however is confident that Kanis have not been totally destroyed morally. *“We usually don’t go in for wrong things. But often we get caught for the wrong deeds of others. Outsiders come to the forest to do illicit liquor brewing. They do it with the full connivance of the Forest Department. And this is a permanent threat to Kanis. When there is a raid, they put the blame on us. When the elephants drink the ‘wash’ and get poisoned or mad, we are in danger. Our crops also get destroyed. We have always lived in harmony with the wild animals. But now their plight is worse than ours. There is so little good forests left and there is so little in the forests. So we and the wild animals suffer the same fate!”*

*“There aren’t many tribal communities living inside the forests. It is not ‘pattayam’ (land ownership) that we need. But survival means by not destroying forests. Not only in the forests, but also outside, food is getting scarce. We need subsidy not only for rubber, but also food crops. We need seeds, implements, and protection from wild animals. There should be strict laws preventing deforestation which should be applicable to the government officials also. We should be given a limited right to depend on the forest resources for surviving and also the duty of protecting it for the whole country,”* Viswanathan concluded.

### **Appukkuttan – Lalithamma**

***“The rising waters took away all our material possessions, the crops were destroyed by the forest officials and we were left high and dry”.***

Appukkuttan Kani was giving the final touches to a beautiful reed house he had built on his own for his daughter to convalesce after a prolonged cancer treatment in Regional Cancer Centre when we met him first. He feels that *“she will recover fully in this unpolluted place. We will be nearby and she will feel secure. Her husband also will come here”.* His daughter Beena who had passed SSLC got married and was living in Kollongod. He had stayed with her for a year and a half by doing odd jobs there. He bought two goats and had somehow managed to live there. But unfortunately she fell ill seriously a few months ago. The EDC gave some money for treatment. *“Many people known to me in Vithura, Anappara etc. collected money for her treatment. Now I am slowly repaying the loans that I took”.*

Appukkuttan Kani has a plot of land in a fertile valley with some surrounding sloping terrain. They have a house built by the PHED which they have maintained well with an added extension. He and Lalithamma are a hardworking couple. But obviously their daughter’s illness has disrupted their lives physically and economically.

*“My family was in Mlappara although I grew up in Cheruppani near Vinoba. My wife has studied up to 8<sup>th</sup> standard and was from Mulayara (Vellanad) which is outside forests and came to Mlappara after marriage,” Appukkuttan said.*

Appukkuttan Kani obviously is very fond of the land he lost in Mlappara. *“It was a beautiful land that I lost to which I was deeply attached. I had actually encroached (‘vettippidichu’) and cleared seven acres of forest by my own labor and cultivated all crops. We had lived there happily for 20 years”.* He had explicit quantitative data about what he lost. *“I had crops whose value would be at least Rs.2.5 lakhs. But I got only Rs.7,500/- as compensation. I had paddy land, two huge tamarind trees, 2000 arecanuts, 60 coconut trees, lots of pepper, banana, tapioca and all other crops. I used to sell tapioca at 40 paise per kilo and make thousands of rupees. We used to dry four mats of pepper every season. We used to hire labourers to pluck pepper. People from Bonaccord used to come to buy our delicious tapioca”.*

Appukkuttan and Lalithamma both are very sad not only about the loss but also about the brutal way in which the Forest Department ousted them from their land. *“We did not get any notice about the eviction. The foresters came and implemented ‘coup felling’ in our land and cut down all the trees, all the crops. When the waters rose, some of our material things also got washed away. We did not get enough time to remove them,”* Lalithamma laments.

*“They promised that they would give us land in Anjumaruthumoodu. They said they will clear the eucalyptus there and allot land to us,”* Appukkuttan said. *“We were supposed to get land for land, a house with 7 rooms, with proper toilet and well and also all assistance to rebuild our life. But here I have just about an acre. You see what we can grow here with elephants and wild boar destroying all crops”.*

*“There are people who refused to take any compensation. There are three such families at Chemmankala. There they have cleared forestland and settled. Even here there are a few who have not got the compensation they deserve. The forest staffs are often ruthless and unreasonable. One cannot say whom they will punish and whose land they will take away. Many have lost land when the Forest Department laid the boundaries of the Wildlife Sanctuary, which passed through our agricultural land”.*

*“Most of the people displaced by the Peppara dam refused to come out of the forest and live closer to plainspeople. They did not want their women to get exposed to outsiders. That is why we did not settle in Anjumaruthumoodu which is closer to the road. Out of the 43 families, only three families preferred to shift out and change our old ways. We were one of them. The others were Radha (my sister) and Gopalan Kani. My brother Viswanathan Kani and myself were the first to reach here and clear land.*

*“While we were clearing the land to settle down our things were stolen. Although the water was rising, the Forest Department did not take any initiative to shift us and allot land to us. So my brother and I came here to clear land. There was a rumour that we*

*will be settled here. So we were not doing any wrong thing. But we were considered as encroachers and the forest officials destroyed our huts several times. But still we persisted. Where else could we go? The rising waters had taken away all our material possessions, the crops were destroyed by the forest officials and we were left high and dry”.*

*“In the beginning we planted paddy in the rich wetland valley and got a lot of rice to eat. We planted an old variety of rice called ‘muthichiri’. There were both black and white varieties of this paddy. Now this variety has disappeared. It may be there in Kunnathery. Now the whole place has become dry. Trees have come up and it is no more possible to grow paddy,” Lalithamma added.*

*“Our conditions is in fact better than others,” Lalithamma says. “We came first and so we got better land than many others. But we were permanently haunted by the thought that they will uproot us again”.*

*“The other families started coming one by one and chose their plots by themselves. It was at least two years later that the PHED constructed a few houses. They were waiting for the Forest Department to allot forestland and put boundary cairns. When at last the forest officials surveyed and put ‘janda’, we lost a good part of our land we had cleared yet again. We also lost some of the land we had cultivated”.*

*“Our plight is actually better,” Lalithamma repeated. “Those who came later got less land, poorer land, uncultivable land”.*

*“42 families settled here first. There must be at least 62 families here now. It was one year after we settled here that the Forest Department did their surveys. There was a Forest Guard, Sadasivan, who was positive to the Kanis. He is now retired and lives at Thottumukku, Anappetty”.*

*They both have only misgivings about the Eco Development Programme. “Our son Binukumar was the first President of EDC. We were also very active in the beginning. My sister Radha took charge as bank nominee. But for a number of reasons people became sceptical about it. My son did not want to take the blame for everything the Forest Department did. Radha also resigned along with him. Every year I go as firewatcher in the forest. I have cleared the fire line up to Agasthyarkoodam. Actually most of the Kanis here are against the Forest Department, partly because of their rude and disrespectful behaviour towards us. We have not understood the concept of EDC. So we think that it is another scheme to distribute some money. A few have got Rs.500/- for treatment. Here there are 60-62 families. But no one co-operates. If there is some financial assistance coming, then all will gather. That is what is wrong with us. There is no one to guide us on how to cope up with the changing times”.*

*“The biggest threat to our crops now is the wild boar. They breed like anything in the degraded forest. We are prohibited from hunting them,” Lalitha said. “If only the EDC could take some action about this menace, they could have got all the Kanis to co-*

*operate. Electric fences are the most effective method of warding off wild boar,”* Appukkuttan Kani concluded.

### **Mary – Manoharan.**

***“Wild boar do come and take away some of our crops. But we have learned to live with them and they with us”.***

I had met Mary every time I went to Podiyakkala. A lean smiling young woman, obviously a non-tribal, not only by her name but also by her appearance. She would be there everywhere, in the school helping the teacher or taking care of the two children forsaken by their mother, tending crops on her piece of land. Once I met her collecting ‘nanakizhangu’ (a small tuber) from her land along with her husband, Manoharan. Manoharan is a typical Kani tribe, short and muscular with a frank smile and friendly nature. Apparently they met at Bonaccord Tea Estate where Mary had grown up in the labour lines and where Manoharan went in search of some work. He had worked as a Forest Watcher in the Bonaccord area for two years. Later he got a job as a rubber tapper in the estate. He had stayed at the estate at that time, met Mary and married her. Mary has 12 years’ service in the Bonaccord Tea Estate where she used to get Rs.50/- per day in addition to all other estate allowances. When the estate closed down due to financial crisis, she lost her job. She is yet to get a lot of money as her due from the estate. Manoharan grew up in Attumpuram. He has two elder brothers settled in Bharathannoor and Amboori and two sisters are Meenankal.

When the dam came Manoharan’s parents were given a small piece of land at Podiyakkala. *“As no one else in my family wanted to come here, we decided to come here and start our life. It is two years since we came here. This house built by the PHED belongs to my mother. My elder brother had also some land here which he sold out to Sudarsan, another Kani”.*

Mary’s aunts are still at the estate. Their family was staying at Maruthamala and then came to the estate as labourers a generation ago. Originally they are from the Kanya Kumari district. *“It was a hard life at the estate. But I had assured salary when things went well. It was actually a very rich estate with tea, rubber, pepper, arecanut and cardamom. But the owners neglected it,”* Mary said. *“We never go to the estate now. I have no hope of getting the money due to me. The labourers are collecting tea leaves and selling it at Kolachikkara. It is abject poverty there. I feel very sad”.*

Mary and Manoharan have two children, Saranya and Sarath who go to the Multi Grade Learning Centre. Mary has studied up to the 5<sup>th</sup> standard. She stopped her studies when her mother died and started working when she was hardly 12 years old. Manoharan studied up to 7<sup>th</sup> standard and had to stop his studies when the dam and displacement disrupted their life. *“It is better to live an independent life, if only there is rich forest near by and we are allowed to live our natural way of life,”* Manoharan said vehemently. *“I collect honey, gooseberries, many other forest produce. One can lead a happy and*

*healthy life on the several tubers collected from the forest, fish and what we cultivate”.* They unlike many other Kani families had more food crops in their land. They were collecting the last of the year’s crop of ‘nanakizhangu’ (a tuber) to be stored as seed material for the next year. They had tapioca, elephant yam, colocasia, papaya and a few vegetables. *“Wild boar do come and take some. But we have learned to live with them and they with us,”* Manoharan laughed.

They always invite us to their neat little house which had solar lighting, a tape recorder and a few decorations beautifying their house. *“We have just managed to start leading our quiet life here. But tragedy struck a few years back,”* Mary started. *“Manoharan’s brother had collected the bark of a forest tree and kept it in our house for a few days while we were away. The forest people saw it and charged a case against Manoharan since such material collection is prohibited in the Sanctuary. He had been after the case since 1994 and had to spend thousands of rupees every time to go to the court at Attingal along with a few witnesses. He has to go again next week also and before that we should have at least a thousand rupees. Where shall we go for that much money?”* Mary started crying.

Manoharan and Mary go for Forest Departmental work whenever there is some work available. That is their only source of income. They lead a very frugal life and have little need for money. But the calamity of such a forest offence case has destabilized their whole economy and mental peace. They are sad and ashamed about being blamed for a crime they would never commit. The forest staff also know the truth but having booked the case had to act. The couple’s only hope is that some miracle will happen this time and he will be absolved of the charge.

The EDC could have done something to relieve him from his plight. Yet the *“EDC has not done anything here so far,”* Manoharan said. *“I have heard that there are other EDCs working well and doing good for the people in areas like the Periyar Tiger Reserve. But except for a Medical Camp they conducted for us at Peppara, they haven’t done anything at all”.*

### **Usha – Satheesan**

***“If only some kind and good officer takes charge and take us into confidence, we all will co-operate for the betterment of the forests and for our own progress”.***

We met Usha and Satheesan at the Multi Grade Learning Centre (MGLC) at Podiyakkala. They had come there to get the Transfer Certificate for their daughter Ramya and son Shyju whom they had shifted to the school at Maruthamala (near Chathankode). Usha is the daughter of one of the eldest Kani men, Bhagavan Kani. She has the strength and ethnicity of the tribal elder who had fought against displacement. She described to us how her father led the struggle along with a few other ‘Moottukanis’ and prevented quite a lot of forest damage and tribal displacement by managing to shift the site of the dam from Plankudy to Podiyakkala. He was one of the few who did not take any

compensation as land or money. He cleared some land in Chemmankala and settled there with his wife Eachi and nine progeny, two of whom died later.

*“We had at least ten acres of land,” Usha said. “We cultivated all crops, from paddy to pepper, coconut, arecanut, cashew, jack and many varieties of mangoes. We also used to do a lot of dry paddy cultivation. There was only our family living at Kalimukhom. It got partially submerged. We held on till the last moment and then they forcefully evicted us. It had really become difficult to live there with water all around our land which had become an island. Threat of wild elephants also increased”.*

Later we came to know that Usha and Satheesan had permanently settled in Chemmankala leaving their land in Podiyakkala where they come only once in a while. Satheesan (who is the son of Swarni and Mathan) has his share of land in Podiyakkala which his brother and sisters are managing. Satheesan’s family was in Cheriad once where they had *“lots of land”* and *“rich agriculture”*.

Usha was very knowledgeable about the tubers they collect from the forest. She narrated their names and their qualities – Neduvan, Nooran, Chengu, Pinnan etc. She told us also about several edible green leafy plants they get from the forest - Kariyappilacheera, Chekkakeera, Kuppakkeera, Thazhuthama, Puliarla, Kodangal, all of which are both tasty and nutritious, good for children, young and old, pregnant women and ailing people. *“Food is actually medicine too. And if we eat wild food, we remain healthy and strong. But all that is gone. Forests are destroyed and the best valley has gone under water”.*

We met their children Ramya (Mathi) and Shyju (Seethangan) at Chemmankala one day. Mathi who is in the 4<sup>th</sup> standard took to us and became our guide that day. She took us to her grandfather (Bhagavan Kani) and to the beautiful traditional ‘machan’ built by her uncle, Vijayan for renting out to tourists. She showed us the drawings of Ajayan, yet another of her uncles. She took us up a hillock to the tree house they have built for “foreign tourists” to stay. The Forest Department is encouraging such ‘ecotourism’ through the EDCs in many places in the Sanctuary.

Usha and Satheesan don’t have any faith in the Forest Department’s activities. *“Their attitude to us is always wrong,”* Satheesan said. He says he himself is a victim of a false charge the Department had framed against him. *“They always believe only the wrong elements among us whom they use as informants. They said they have reliable information from a neighbour Kani about me cutting down a forest tree. I have never in my life cut down a tree for any selfish reasons or to make money. No Kani has ever become rich through tree felling or poaching. It is the outsiders including the forest officials who make large sums of money by such wrong doings,”* Satheesan said sadly.

*“It is our misfortune,”* Usha said. *“We had to pay Rs.2,500/- as fine for a crime we did not commit. We had to go to Punaloor often for the case. This also costs money we cannot afford. We are constantly harassed by the forest staff”.*

Usha and Satheesan are hopeful that EDC will be able to do some good for the people. *“If only some kind and good official takes charge and takes us into confidence, we all will co-operate for the betterment of the forests and for our own progress,”* Satheesan said.

Satheesan and Usha have built a small reed hut on the slope of a hill in Chemmankala where they spend most of the time. Mathi took us there one day when her parents were away on work in the forest coup. They have a beautifully terraced garden with lots of flowering plants. Diversity of food plants is also more in their house than in most other houses. They have cultivated vegetables, fruits like papaya and guava, tubers like tapioca, colocasia, banana and drumstick. They have taken care to retain a few old jack and mango trees against the expanding wave of rubber.

### ***Women Only Families.***

#### **Kali – Santha**

*“Life is becoming impossible. Now they say they are going to close the shutters of the dam and increase the reservoir capacity. Then we will be ousted once again”.*

Kali, a widow and Santha, her unmarried elder daughter stay in a tiny dilapidated house built by the PHED in Podiyakkala. Their little hut has a wide veranda made of reed which can seat at least fifty people comfortably.

They are all alone in the world without any male support. But their house is a refuge for all the women in Podiyakkala to gather in their loneliness, or for working together, or spending the long evenings and intimidating nights, while storms shook their little huts or wild elephants came down to their fields.

Kali and Santha were not always orphaned like now. Kali’s husband Madhavan Kani was quite a capable man. He had gone for the land survey for the dam and PHED had given him employment as a watcher at the dam site. They had a son Mathan and two daughters, Santha and Parappi. Mathan and wife stay nearby with their three sons. Parappi has her share of land here but stays with her husband at Njaraneeli.

*“Our land at Prithikuzhi got completely submerged,”* Kali said. *“Our crops, our shifting cultivation rhythm and our communal harmony all got lost in the dam”.*

*“We never had to go for any wage labour before coming here. But poverty has now forced us to go for forest labour work. After my father’s death even my mother started going for work. It is very hard work in the burning sun, clearing firelines, digging pits, planting, weeding and so on. I don’t like that work at all. And the trees they plant are all useless – Eucalyptus, Acacia, Manjium – all good for neither man nor beast,”* Santha said.

Santha is a sad but very intelligent young woman. She described how risky and dangerous it is to work in the forest. *“Even reaching the spot of work, many kilometers*

*away is tough. Sometimes there would be elephants on the way and we would return. Two years back Velu Kani who was going to the coupe area was killed by an elephant. Even the other day, one Muslim man from Parandode was trampled to death by an elephant in our area”.*

The long route from near Peppara dam to Podiyakkala passes through old degraded Eucalyptus plantations which have been partly converted to Acacia. It is an old coupe road that skirts the reservoir and has elephants all the time moving around in search of food and water and using it as a corridor to move from larger tracts of natural forests. Ecologically sensitive and degrading rapidly due to past mismanagement, the whole area is further subjected to the deleterious effects of the fluctuating water level in the reservoir and the micro climatic changes due to the dam reservoir. Thus the area, like any dam-affected area is environmentally unfit for stable agriculture or healthy living.

Santha is unmarried and also uneducated. She was not sent to school because her father wanted her to keep company for her mother. But she is very intelligent with an exceptional clarity of thinking and she is capable of articulating her thoughts and convictions strongly.

Santha loves to cultivate and wants to be self-sufficient and independent. *“I try to plant anything, everything I get. It is a pity that all are shifting to rubber. Rubber does not allow anything to grow underneath it or anywhere near it. No bird or animal, wild or domesticated can find anything to eat under rubber. So all the birds and animals gather in the field where food crops are grown. I used to grow dry paddy during the first few years after coming here and got a good harvest. Now also I try to plant paddy, green gram, sorghum etc. But all the hens in the locality will be here and will eat up even the seeds in the soil. At night the wild boar will eat up whatever is left”.*

*“Yet I keep on trying. Even if I get a little, I feel very happy and satisfied. I planted some varieties of tubers and green gram last season. Wild boars destroyed most of it. I got a handful of green gram which I wrapped in a paper and kept it amidst the rafters to be used as seeds. I had to go away somewhere that day and it rained heavily. The seeds got soaked and sadly we had to cook and eat it that night!”*

*“Now our only hope is in the rubber trees growing all around us. The subsidy from the Rubber Board of Rs.1/- per bed taken, 50 paise for manuring each seedling, Rs.1/- per plant for weeding etc. tempted us to convert the whole area into rubber. We were forced to cut down all trees including the rubber seedlings we had grown ourselves. Now we are torn between hope and doubt. I was very much against cutting down our jack trees. At least we could have cooked the jack fruits and eaten it when there was nothing else. Now not even our ‘kanthari’ (green chilly variety) grows in the sea of rubber,” Kali says.*

*“Life is becoming impossible. They now say that they want to close the shutters of the dam and increase the reservoir capacity. 6-7 houses including ours are facing the threat of submersion. Now that we are just settling down after the trauma of uprooting, we have been warned of yet another displacement,” Santha says.*

*“This house, all these crops, the labor of the last 20 years all will go again,” Kali says angrily. “But where are we to go? I know that resisting this move will be of no use. We did it before. In the face of the need of thousands of people in the city, our life after all is nothing. We were just hoping that within a few years, the few rubber sheets we get will give us some money for at least buying rice”.*

Santha, like her mother has stopped going for forest work because of ill health and manages to subsist by making reed baskets. The women who gather in their veranda in the evenings all bring their reed raw material and work together, talking, listening to a radio, singing and chewing betel leaves. Often there is very little food. They showed us the various stages of processing the reed and the various sizes to which the sun-dried reed are to be trimmed and the types and shapes of the baskets they weave. Obviously it is tough work needing strength and dexterity. It needs tremendous patience, keen eyesight and experience. The trimmed reeds are razor sharp and so their fingers get regularly slashed however careful they are.

*“We take the ‘vatti’ (baskets) to the local markets in Meenankal, Nedumangad and Vithura,” Santha says. “We manage to make around 15 baskets in 4-5 days. Ordinary baskets (‘venpoli vatti’) fetch Rs.5-6/- and special ones (‘karimpoli vatti’) Rs.10/-. If there is demand for big baskets we make a number of them and take them all together to the market. We might get a maximum of Rs.100-150/- after all this labor extending over a week,” Santha says. So in a month they would get a maximum of Rs.500/- from the reed baskets, the weaving of which takes their whole evenings and a lot of labor in collecting and transporting the reeds, processing, drying etc. “There is money in this only to buy rice. We never have enough for buying clothes or other necessities”.*

*“In the Nedumangad market, we can get a bit more money than in other markets. But then the bus charges and the shop charges are too much. They demand Rs.20/- as shop charge at Nedumangad market,” Kali puts in.*

Santha sometimes goes with other women to the forest to collect forest produce. It is a tough job but she loves to go to the cool natural forests where one does not get tired. *“It is easier to collect tubers and medicinal plants from evergreen forests,” she says. “The soil is always wet and the roots don’t go too deep. During Kumbam-Meenom (February-March) I collect ‘vayanapoo’ (Cinnamomum zeylanicum). I also collect the tubers of ‘padathali’ (Cyclea peltata) and ‘Sathavarikizhangu’ (Asparagus)”.*

*“It is not economical now a days. They are not available as earlier in the degraded forest near our place. And women are not physically able to collect them also. Even if we collect them over days of toil, the dried material will be very little and not worth taking the trouble to sell it in the market outside”.*

There are at least five ‘women only families’ in Podiyakkala. Obviously women only families are in every way more impoverished and insecure than families with a man or men capable of physical work and with more bargaining power. *“We are able to collect*

*very little and are not able to get a just price for the produce. Dried vayanapoo and padathali each fetches Rs.50/- per kg. Sathavarikizhangu much less. We have a few arecanut trees. But a kilogram of arecanut fetches only Rs.4.50/-.*

Both Kali and Santha have no great expectations in the EDC. *“The forest officers have always been antagonistic to us. They have no love for the forests either. They have no sympathy for our situation. Then how can they manage a project for the good of the forest and for us. They know only to employ a few of us as watchers and make them cheat us still further. They want to take away all our rights in the forest. But they should understand that we are not the destroyers of forests. Sometimes out of starvation, some of us do assist poachers. And we have the bad habit of setting fire to forests. But actually they should bring us all together and teach us how to live without destroying the forests,”* Santha says.

There are two SHGs in Podiyakkala, one started by Kudumbasree and another by the EDC. *“Only 7-10 women attend the SHG which meets in our veranda,”* Kali says. *“I am a member. But Santha hasn’t joined. For a family whose sole income is less than Rs.500/- per month, it is impossible to contribute Rs.10/-per week to the SHG. There are about 17 members, but all of them do not contribute regularly. Anyway we want to take up some project through the SHG. We need all help from people like you”.*

*“Our only hope now is in the rubber trees. As aging women, we see no future either in the Department work or collecting forest materials. But how long a human being can hope to live on rubber and survive on commodities bought with the money from rubber? Can we ever hope to regain the health and happiness we had before we were evicted from paradise?”*

As we took leave of her, Kali offered us three golden reed baskets made by her daughter. Her poignant questions rang loud in our minds with no confident positive answers. We could only give her some money for the beautifully made strong baskets, may be a bit more than what she would have got in the market. But can any one of us give her the real answers for her questions? She promised to make more baskets for our friends and families, may be hoping we all together could give her the practical relevant answer.

### **Bhagavathy – Aruvi – Anitha**

*“We had lots of good land there. Being true Malankanis, we do not remember the quantity of anything, whether land or money or life”.*

Bhagavathy is the matriarch of Podiyakkala, the strong willed, decisive woman leader. She is bitter but with a wry humour, she is sad but always asserting her Kani identity and pride. Her mother was Kochali and they were at Cheriad. Bhagavathy has two daughters, the elder one Parappi married to Raman Kani and the younger one Aruvi (Sujatha) forsaken by her husband. Aruvi has a daughter Anitha, 13 years old. Bhagavathy, Aruvi and Anitha live together. Parappi has suddenly turned mentally challenged. *“Raman is kind and considerate to her, loves her deeply and looks after her,*

*but she turns violent when she sees him and has attempted to hack him several times with a knife,”* Bhagavathy says.

We could see the saplings and even big trees lying about in a plot nearby, all cut down by Parappi in her insane violence. *“She tolerates only Anitha, my grand daughter who takes some food for her in the evenings. She must be eating some of it to keep alive,”* Bhagavathy says sadly.

This women only family has a tiny fragile hut perching on a steep slope. Obviously they did not get any compensation or even a PHED house when they shifted from Cheriad. *“We had lots of good land there. Being a true Malankani and proud of being one, I do not remember the quantity of anything, whether land or money or life”.* Bhagavathy is philosophical and almost poetic when describing how beautiful and sacred their life was.

Bhagavathy is very sad about the plight of both the daughters. In Parappi’s case, she is anxious about Raman who is like a son to her. He stays with his aunt now, but comes to his wife every day with a faint hope that she might become sane and loving, just as she had turned insane and violent all on a sudden. *“They were a loving couple,”* Bhagavathy says. *“They would always be together, working in the land or going to the market. If he is late from some work outside the forest, she would wait for him, sometimes even go in search of him. But how did this happen?”*

Bhagavathy is angry about the tragedy of Aruvi’s life. *“They were abandoned by the scoundrel. Now he wants to help his daughter. But we don’t need any help any more”.* Aruvi is strong and hardworking. She is independent and capable of looking after her aging mother and weak daughter. They are however the poorest family in Podiyakkala. Their house is a tiny badly made reed hut, their land is steep and unfit for cultivation and they are not literate enough to cope with the demands of the changing times. Part of their land will get submerged if the dam storage is enhanced and then it will be impossible for them to live on the edge of the reservoir.

Anitha goes to the 7<sup>th</sup> standard in the Meenankal School. She is a sweet and soft spoken girl but with a temper of her own. Obviously doted and spoilt by the matriarch, she has failed twice in school and is physically weak and incapable of hard work unlike the two elder women.

Bhagavathy and Aruvi represent the last of a wise and old group of people with a fund of knowledge about the natural resources and about how to use them sustainably. In them we see the end of a way of living and a way of looking at life and the world. Not only their knowledge and lifestyles but also their philosophy is most relevant and needed by the mainstream society in these times of competition, strife and disintegration.

## **Young Women**

### **Sheela, Wife of Mohan**

*“I never feel trapped in this forest settlement... Life is difficult... but I feel secure. There is poverty, but poverty of money only...”*

Sheela (Kani name, Aruvi) is a tiny young woman, reserved but warm. She has strong Kani features and the characteristic skin colour and an ethnic appearance, a fast vanishing trait in the changing world of Kani women. She is Devaki's daughter. Her father Krishnan Kani died when she was very young leaving her mother an inconsolable widow and herself a sad and lonely child. This bereavement obviously forced her mother to become self-reliant and bring up her daughter all alone doing daily labor work in the Forest Department's plantations.

Sheela's husband is a committed social worker in their community, helping the needy and taking up their cause with the authorities. They have four children, one daughter of about ten years and three sons.

Sheela was a good student, keen on studies and all other activities in the school. After shifting to Podiyakkala from Maruvappara, she used to walk more than 20 kilometers everyday climbing hills and crossing forests to reach her school in Anappara and get back home. She studied in Meenankal also but could not complete her SSLC. *“I am still very sad about not continuing my studies. I really loved studying. Even now I like to read and get knowledge. But where is the time and from where can I get good books?”*

Sheela is happy that her husband is involved in social work among their people. This leaves her and her four small children all alone periodically. But she believes that he should do it. *“My mother, Devaki stays with us now. She goes for coup work whenever there is some work available and gets Rs.85/- per day. We get a maximum of 20 days work in an year. She also goes for collecting tubers, gooseberries, medicinal plants etc from the forests. I never go. I have enough work at home and on the land. I love to cultivate and grow flowering plants. But now rubber is going to destroy it all. All the beauty of the land will be gone when rubber grows,”* she says sadly.

*“We had mango trees, jack, cashew. Lots of huge wild trees here also, all of which were cut down to plant rubber. Now the Rubber Board insists on constant weeding. So nothing grows. Even the reeds we depend on for our house making, basket weaving etc. have to be destroyed for the wretched rubber. Now we are forced to move deep into the forests to collect our neduvan, nooran and other edible tubers which are actually our staple food. They alone can give us the strength and health to lead the harsh life in the forest. Now we've forgotten that we used to get them free everywhere, all around us. Rubber has devoured it all”.*

Sheela is a very intelligent and analytical person. She knows how unjust the world outside is and how difficult life is. So she is happy that she is living inside the 'sanctuary

of the forest' and not outside, exposed to the harsh world. *"I never feel trapped here in this settlement like many others. Life is difficult. Foresters are sometimes unreasonable. But still I feel secure. As long as the forests are close by and I am with my own people, I feel secure. There is poverty, but poverty of money only. People are still prepared to help each other in a crisis unlike in the world outside"*.

Sheela is a member of an SHG. *"I am eager to save some money for my children's education. Except the youngest, all children go to the MGLC. They need uniform, books, bags, chappals etc. When they fall ill, our whole life turns topsy-turvy. My husband gets very frightened when the children are ill. Otherwise he is a brave man,"* she laughs.

Sheela wants to do something different and viable through the SHG. *"What about pickle making?"* she asks. *"With the gooseberries and other wild fruits we collect from the forest we could really start making a lot of pickles and preserves. Instead of selling the gooseberries for Rs.2/- per kilo, I could make pickle or arishtam and sell it for a small profit"*.

Mohan was once a fire watcher in the Forest Department. Sheela is disappointed about the functioning of the EDC. *"It is actually a good project. But the foresters didn't really make us understand its real value. There were some unfortunate incidents which alienated the whole settlement from the project. But I still believe that it should be rejuvenated and made to function properly so that all of us would benefit out of it"*.

### **Vasantha, Daughter of Bhagavan Kani**

*"... We will be forced to change, just as we were forced to shift. But then our Moottukani will not be able to guide us in any way"*.

Vasantha is one of the seven offspring of Bhagavan Kani (Chemmankala) and Eachy. Her sisters, Usha, Madhavi and Ramani are all married. But Vasantha stays with her mother (at Chemmankala) who is bed ridden with partial paralysis for the past six years. She has three brothers, one of whom is in the army, the others staying with her are engaged in self-styled ecotourism.

Vasantha is a friendly, outspoken modern girl, but has the strength and pride of being the daughter of the Kani elder who had led the resistance against the dam displacement in the early 1980s. *"I was not able to complete my studies as I had to look after my ailing mother and the four children of my sisters"*. Her sister Usha's children were there with her the day we met her at her house in Chemmankala.

*"We were at Kalimukhom before displacement. Ours was the only house at Kalimukhom. Actually we were originally at Chemmankala. But then we moved to Kalimukhom. The place is called so because a Kani lady named Kali had lived there long ago. There are mango trees planted by her still in that area. It was a very good place. Even now we go there at times to collect mangoes. Elephants have destroyed all our crops"*.

*“My father being a very independent man did not want any position or power in the community. So he always lived alone. Actually he lives in some part of his own, with his own thoughts and memories. Nowadays he wouldn’t even come to visit my mother”.*

Theirs is a beautiful traditional kanikkudy with a wide veranda and two small rooms with a neat kitchen. They have a garden with lots of flowering plants and a large cage with wild captive jungle mynas and parakeets. They have retained a large number of forest trees. There are quite a lot of agricultural implements, carpentry tools, traditional fishing gear... all artifacts of a happy and wealthy past.

*“We had at least ten acres of land at Kalimukhom. There were several coconuts, arecanuts, cashew, mango, jack, pepper etc. We also had a few ‘kandam’ (plots) of wet paddy near the river. We used to cultivate dry paddy also. So there was always enough food to eat and to share with others”.*

*“My father resisted the uprooting till the very last. He said he would not take any compensation. But then waters rose all around us. Our land did not drown but it became an island in the vast water body. I feel frightened even now when I think about it”.*

*“Elephants started coming to our land swimming across in the reservoir. The whole climate changed. The land became slushy and dangerous to walk near the edge of the reservoir. It is not like the bank of a river where one can go safely to bathe or collect water. The reservoir edges are dangerous. We stayed on only for a few days after the waters rose. We came to Chemmankala with whatever we could collect in a bamboo raft”.*

*“I was 12 years old then,” Vasantha says. “My real name is Aruvi. But in school they changed it to Vasantha. I am really proud of being a Kani. There is a freedom and the strength of self-reliance in leading a life in the forest. We don’t have to depend on anybody, especially the government for anything”. As such Vasantha is not very keen on government programs like the EDC. “My brother-in-law, Mallan is in charge of the EDC. He is a good man and a knowledgeable man. But there is little he can do in the present condition. There is so much corruption among officials and no one is really bothered about us. But we know that we cannot go on forever like this. We will be forced to change just as we were forced to shift. But then our ‘Moottukani’ will not be able to guide us in any way”.*

Vasantha’s eyes fill with tears when we take leave of her after the sessions of journeys to the past. Her niece, Mathi guides us to the other houses nearby. She was keen that we meet her father. *“My father may not stop talking once he starts,”* she warned us. She also wanted us to see the hut on stilts built by her brother, Vijayan for tourists.

Most of them even the young ones are happy to guide us around their world holding back nothing. But would be care to let them into our world hiding nothing?

## **Eachi, Daughter of Mallan Moottukani of Chemmankala.**

*“The world is changing so rapidly. But I think we Kanis should retain our truth, our culture”.*

We met Eachi at her house in Chemmankala twice. Daughter of Mallan Moottukani of that settlement who was in the forefront of the resistance against the Peppara dam, she is a real Malankani woman. Though looking very young, may be she is in her late thirties, Eachi firmly believes that Kanis should not give up their old ways. *“We will be nothing if we change our old culture. No human being should forget his roots,”* She says repeatedly.

Eachi is a shy and reserved woman, but like all traditional Kani women, she warms up once she accepts us. She talks laughing all the time, but beneath the laughter always is the sorrow for all the vanishing old truths and a deep yearning for justice they have known in their world. She offered us gooseberries and put a wooden flat seat for me to sit when we met her for the first time. She is short, fair and beautiful in spite of the hardships of life.

Eachi talks of Plangudi where the dam was first planned. *“The first thing they did was to cut all the trees. They just came and started destroying the forests. We just could not stand it. My father opposed the destruction. Then we were asked to shift from our house. My father refused. He went on a strike. He really had to suffer quite a lot of hardships to get the dam site shifted to Peppara. This saved Chathankode and most of Chemmankala settlements”.*

*“We did not take any compensation from the PHED. Life was so rich and healthy then. How can anyone compensate for the loss of that life?”* she asks.

*“We had lots of wild tubers, honey, pineapple, jack and mango fruits. Certain days we would just eat fruits and honey. The river had lots of fish and sometimes we would trap some animals too. We used to have several varieties of tapioca in our land and many kinds of banana. All gone now. Forever”.*

*“We Kanikkars were famous for our hospitality. Formerly we would have given you lots of food. We would never allow anyone to go away without eating with us. But now the greatest poverty is lack of food, not lack of money,”* Eachi says.

*“Now the rubber has grown and in its shade, no food crops grow. This is the real starvation faced by Kanis”.*

*“The world is changing so rapidly. But I think we Kanis should retain our truth, our culture. But these are times when Kanis are also becoming thieves, cheats”.*

*“Let people say whatever they want about our poverty, our lack of good clothes. Why should we bother? I believe that we should not forget our truth and our culture. One day*

*things are sure to get better. Then we should feel proud and confident about our stance,” Eachi says with unshakable conviction.*

*“Even when I go to the town once in a blue moon, I wear my Kani dress – a mundu, a blouse and a towel. That’s all. I have never worn a sari. And I won’t. If I have to change this form of mine, or this attire of mine, I should die,” she said.*

Eachi became silent, lost in thoughts for a time and said softly, *“who knows what the future hold for any one of us? After my death, what will happen to our people? What will my children do? Of course that is their decision, they are free to mould their life as they want to. But this father of mine, and we children will follow only the path of truth”.*

Eachi looks around 35, but she doesn’t know her age. *“Everything seems like yesterday for me. I grew up in a world where no one measured time in days or years. But when my children were born, I noted the date and have counted their age. I am 45 in my ration card”.*

*“I must have been around 20 when I got married. I have two daughters and a son. My elder daughter got married recently”.*

*“The displacement seems like yesterday... It all feels like a dream – the trauma of shifting, the familiar and dear river swelling into a huge frightening water mass. Everything, the whole world changed since then. For months, I couldn’t sleep calmly. There was always a wind howling and a strange heat wave engulfing the land. The beauty and the diversity of the land are gone forever. It is as though some evil spirit has affected the whole valley.”*

Eachi is sad that her old freedom and happiness have been destroyed. *“I wish I could recreate a world where one doesn’t have to measure or count anything, whether it is time or land or money...”*

## **Young Men Who Take the Lead**

### **Saikumar, Son of Mallan Moottukani**

*“We cannot go on forever waiting for the government to set things right... And above all we should plan ways and means of restoring the original forest wealth of this area”.*

A pleasant, straightforward young man, we met Saikumar at Viswanathan Kani’s house at Podiyakkala one day. We were talking to Viswanathan and Savithry about why the Podiyakkala EDC is not functioning as it should. They explained to us how easily the Kanis would get swayed by tall promises from the part of the government and how soon they would get disappointed and turn against any project or person, however good it may be. They quoted the example of Saikumar, the present EDC President who was trying his level best to balance both sides – that of his own community and of the Forest Department and getting nowhere. Saikumar came in at that moment.

Saikumar is the son of Mallan, Moottukani of Podiyakkala. He would be around 30, married and with a baby daughter. He seemed frank and honest, and eager to give us his version of the complex story of the EDC which seems to have grown into a big issue of conflict and disharmony among the people.

Saikumar took us to his house, a neat reed hut in a steep and obviously uncultivable land. At that time his wife was at her house in Pattankulichapara on delivery and he was all alone there. He gave us the whole afternoon explaining his problems in detail, taking us to his father and brother and seeing us off with a hope and prayer that things should improve.

Saikumar's family was in Cheriad when the dam came. His father resisted the uprooting along with all other elders at that time. But they were forced to shift at last. Theirs was one of the last families to come to Podiyakkala. Hence they got a bad piece of land, in spite of Mallan being the 'Moottukani'.

Saikumar talked of the Eco Development Programme which he sees as the only viable programme that can improve the plight of Kanis in Peppara. *"Actually the primary aim of EDC is forest protection with the full participation of all people who are dependent on the forest for survival,"* he began. *"But we, Adivasis need a lot of coaching regarding this very concept. We being displaced people should be given special consideration in this programme. We are an aggrieved lot. So it would be difficult for the authorities to regain our trust and goodwill. But the Forest Department does just the opposite. Even if we work 30 days, they would mark our attendance as 15 days and give us only half of what we deserve. This sort of cheating has alienated the people totally. They shouldn't think that we are illiterate and not capable of counting the days we have worked"*.

Saikumar is against subsidies, of any kind. *"Subsidies are actually spoiling all people. The Rubber Board has done the greatest crime to our people. It has given us subsidy to clear forest, to take pits, to plant, weed and apply fertilizers for the rubber seedlings they give. There are other organizations like the Sai Baba Bhakta Sangh who once in a while come with their charity of old clothes and medicines, one day's food and so on. Our people actually think that EDC is also some such business. This is where the Forest Department failed miserably. They didn't convey the concept of EDC to us at all"*.

*"Formerly we were mortally scared of the forest guard whom we called 'Pillampuran' considering them as the greatest authority, next to the Travancore Maharaja. But now we really don't care. We have no respect for them. Even when they call us for meetings, we never bother to go. Last year there was a training programme on ecotourism at Peppara conducted for the local people by the Forest Department. None of us went"*.

*"The Forest Department is allowing tourists to come into the Sanctuary. This is not a good thing as far as Kanis are concerned. They are encouraging us to build 'machans' (tree houses) in many parts of the Sanctuary. But they are not viable. Unless there is regular smoke and fire inside the huts, the reed leaf thatch and the reed walls will get*

*destroyed in no time. It happened in Bonaccord recently. The tree house just crumbled and came down to the ground. This is not a viable programme. Making Kanis tourist guides or caterers of food is not a healthy idea at all,” Saikumar says.*

*“We used to live collecting forest produce and cultivating all these years. Now they are quoting a Central Government Law preventing collection in Protected Areas and preventing us from collecting anything. This has angered the Kanis quite a lot. At least the Forest Department should have given us other lands for our survival. Three years ago they gave us a list of forest produce permitted to be collected. In that list there were more than hundred wild plant materials with their market prices. But then suddenly they have banned all collection”.*

*“Kanis are entitled for getting work during the fire season as fire watchers in the forest. At least five of us used to get the job of firewatchers during the summer every year. Now three outsiders are taken on the recommendation of the Forest Minister and only two Kanis get employment. It is the policy of the government now to give the firewatchers’ job to the Bonaccord estate labor. This has deprived us of even this right”.*

Saikumar explained to us all the problems that have come up in the functioning of the EDC. *“The Ecodevelopment Programme is not going well mainly because tall promises were made by certain forest officials in the very beginning. People were offered money, employment, saplings, agricultural subsidy, houses etc. But they were not told that this is a programme that needed their voluntary effort and total support”.*

*“There are six EDCs in the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary including the one at Podiyakkala. In the Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary, there are 21 EDCs. The Forest Department would have allotted some money for this programme. But how much is allotted for each EDC would be decided arbitrarily. For example, they would say Rs.75,000/- will be there for fire prevention for the 300 ha. under Podiyakkala EDC. But later it will be reduced to Rs.50,000/-. Finally only three or four watchers would be employed. At Podiyam, they were promised Rs.50,000/- but were given only Rs.25,000/-. These sorts of anomalies create distrust and enmity in the minds of the Kanis. This is what has happened here. Now I am caught between the two and have gained only a lot of antipathy from both sides”.*

Saikumar however wants to make the program viable. *“Actually what the Forest Department should do is to assist in the development of this area, not give employment to a few of us. If they have Rs.50,000/- they should tell us so and give us the money for constructing the culverts on the road from Anjumaruthumoodu. The two culverts would need around three lakh rupees which can be constructed step by step with our labor. The Foresters should gain the people’s confidence by offering to clear that road which is needed for our survival. They can make us do anything by being kind and just to us. We will do fire watching and forest protection work voluntarily if they utilize the money for our welfare”.*

Saikumar believes that the distrust that the people have towards the Forest Department is age old. *“Although the PHED had promised to get 110 ha. from the Forest Department for our resettlement, they got only less than 50 ha. According to the survey conducted by the Forest Department, the area of Podiyakkala is 50 ha. But our independent survey confirms that we have only about 39 ha. with us. 9 ha. is allotted for institutions like the Balavady, EDC office etc.”.*

*“We have right now Rs.43,000/- as core fund in our EDC. We are thinking of bringing a few sewing machines for the young women and also planning few other things”.*

*“Somehow we should get forest clearance for the road from Anjumaruthumoodu to Podiyakkala. The District Panchayat will construct the road as soon as the clearance is received. We should be given assured employment by the Forest Department. Running the canteen at Bonaccord during Agasthyarkoodam pilgrimage season is a lucrative thing. One can make a neat profit of one lakh rupees. Now the work is given to the Podiyam EDC. But they should give the contract for this work by turns to all the EDCs in the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary”.*

*“We can also think in terms of a commercial activity like a market for hill products like honey, gooseberries, medicinal plants etc. We can plant many trees of economic value like sapota, jathi (Myristica sp.), Murikku (Erythrina) and pepper. We can plant dammar tree (Canarium), karuvapatta etc. Now the forests are not evergreen. They have degraded to dry deciduous forests. We should rejuvenate the natural forests”.*

*“There is a Co-operative Society in Adiparambu. But non-tribals take all the products from the forests illegally and take it to the black market. At the same time we are not able to collect anything because of the so-called Sanctuary. But tribals living elsewhere are allowed to collect from nearby forest areas. This disparity should be corrected”.*

When we asked him about the tragic case of the elephant death which led to the people getting antagonistic to EDC, Saikumar explained the story in great detail. *“There is heavy illegal brewing of liquor in Kuttappara done by non-tribals. They use all sorts of lethal chemicals, including Furadan (a toxic pesticide) to increase the strength of the brew. Elephants are attracted by the smell of the distillery and often drink the ‘wash’. Once a female elephant drank this toxic brew and burnt its trunk, mouth and innards. Its intestine came out and it was in intense pain. Veterinary doctors were brought in and they tried to tranquilize it. But the poor elephant died. There was also a baby elephant along with it which had to be driven off into the forest. The Forest Department convened the EDC and told us that we will be given money to cremate the elephant. But when all the work was done they refused to give us our wages or even the cost of the tea served by one of us who had a small shop at that time. He went to the Sanctuary head quarters and asked for money. The Range Officer who was drunk got angry and thrashed him. There was a big hue and cry in the settlement. All the Kanis decided to oppose the Forest Department’s programme. That summer, the Forest Department did not employ a single Kani from Podiyakkala as firewatcher in the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary. This provoked a few of us to set fire to the forests and destroy whatever shreds of good relationship we*

*had with the Forest Department. Although it was the Range Officer who had beaten him up, later the case was filed against an innocent Forester and me”.*

*“Everywhere Kanis are made use of for brewing illicit liquor. Even girls are being used and they also develop the habit of drinking. This is a major threat to wild animals, forests and also human beings in all forest areas. I am most concerned about this issue because Kanis are always made scapegoats, not only in the brewing, but also as consumers of the toxic brew”.*

Saikumar was very clear about how development should come in the Kani areas. *“We cannot go on for ever waiting for the government to set things right. We should understand what we have now, how much land there is and what we should do on the land to ensure at least part of our food. We should also look into what all employment we can generate here, what all products we can collect and process here itself for the urban organic market. And above all we should plan ways and means of restoring the original forest wealth of this area. This is utmost necessary for our long-term survival”.*

### **Mallan, Son of Bhagavan Kani**

*“If the Kani gets pattayam, the next day he will be in the streets”.*

We have known Mallan for more than twenty five years, ever since he was a small boy. He was a smart boy who had shown leadership qualities even when he was quite young. He used to be enthusiastic about studies and gaining knowledge.

Mallan was in the forefront of the resistance against clear felling the forests in that area for conversion into eucalyptus plantations in the late 1970s. He had opposed the application of pesticides and fungicides in the eucalyptus plantations raised in the catchments of the Peppara reservoir. He had argued that these chemicals were poisoning the drinking water of Thiruvananthapuram city and suburbs. Even recently while the Kerala Forest Development Corporation (KFDC) who owns the plantations tried to apply pesticides, Mallan and his friends had opposed the move and prevented it.

Although Mallan’s land was not submerged, his family was forced to move further upstream in Chathancode. Their life at Chathancode settlement which is on the edge of the reservoir has been adversely affected by the dam. Moreover he has been doing quite a lot of social work for his people with the co-operation of environmentalists, Forest Department and concerned individuals. He is also the President of the Chathancode EDC for the last three years.

Mallan is the son of Bhagavan (Moottukani of Chathancode) and Eachi. He has three brothers and two sisters. Except one brother who is at Valiyakala, the rest are all at Chathancode staying close to each other. Mallan alone has built a small reed hut in Chemmankala in the land belonging to his wife Madhavi (daughter of Bhagavan Kani, the elder). He has two small daughters.

Mallan talked in detail about the present plight of the Kani with special emphasis on the controversial Ecodevelopment Programme. *“We Kanis have to accept the fact that we are now part of a Wildlife Sanctuary, the protection of which is needed for the Peppara reservoir, the only water source of lakhs of people,”* Mallan began.

*“In one way our activities are restricted. But in so many other ways we are protected. We have been allotted land without ‘pattayam’ (ownership title), but we can live peacefully here as long as we want to. It is good that we are not given pattayam and no one else can encroach into our area here unlike in many other Kani areas. Once the Kanis get pattayam, he will be in the ‘puramboke’ or on the road’s verge”.*

Another problem that Mallan sees is the bureaucratic functioning of the Forest Department and the routine corruption and inefficiency. *“All EDCs are supposed to have at least Rupees One Lakh as seed money. But actually they get only around Rs.50,000/-. But this would have been sufficient if we are given regular work and assisted to evolve viable projects”.*

*“Seven EDCs were established in the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary – Podiyam, Podiyakkala, Kunnathery, Cherumankal, Anakallu, Chathancode and Bonaccord. Of these Anakallu and Kunnathery EDCs are not functioning. Except the Bonaccord EDC (which is run by the unemployed tea estate labourers), all the rest are Kani (tribal) EDCs. The Podiyam EDC is functioning well because they get the contract for the Athirumala canteen during January-February Agasthyarkoodam pilgrimage season. They bring the provisions by boat to Kavyattu and take it up by head load. So they are able to get some profit. But the real profit is for the Bonaccord EDC of non-tribals who get the contract for the Bonaccord canteen during the Agasthyarkoodam season. They made a neat profit of Rs,1,16,000/- last season. They have Rs.1.30,000/- as seed money now”.*

There are regular tourists visiting the waterfall at Pochanithooval and stray groups visiting, Agasthyarkoodam during off-season also. *“The Forest Department would give permission and it was the sole right and duty of a few Kanis like my father Bhagavan Kani to be their guides. This was a source of regular income for us. And when we go as guides, we would have seen to it that the tourists don’t leave garbage or set fire to the forests or take away valuable plants. But nowadays even this work is being given to non-tribals appointed by the Minister or political big wigs through the forest officials”.*

*“They started giving employment to the Bonaccord tea estate labourers because the estate had closed down and there were reports about starvation deaths. But now the estate is functioning. The labourers themselves are plucking tea leaves and collecting pepper, cardamom etc. and making a living. It is we who are totally dependent on forests. And it is only we who know the forests. So we should be given some priority”.*

*“Actually the Eco Development Programme is a very good measure in which there can never be corruption. Many forest officers are against the whole thing. They do not want*

*to hand over charge to people, or involve outsiders in the work. But they cannot protect the forest without our help”.*

*“There should be a proper Micro plan for every EDC. But most plans are faulty and not properly prepared. In our micro plan there is only a vague plan for economic activity through hill produce commerce and candle making. But for the Bonaccord EDC they gave 1 lakh rupees for a readymade dress making unit which is much more viable and profitable. It is as though Kanis are not capable of doing any skilled work. This is wrong. Our youngsters are actually much more talented and capable than plainspeople. But the oppression continues at every level”.*

*“Even I, who have always co-operated with the Forest Department, am fed up. I feel reluctant even to attend the committee meetings. Everything feels like a waste of time”.*

Mallan is sad that even after all these years and a lot of awareness among the public, the condition of the forest has only deteriorated. *“Forests are being destroyed everywhere. Forest fire is getting uncontrollable, mainly because of the frustration of the people and it is often the result of conflicts among various groups of people. Mining for precious and semi precious stones is also rampant in this part of Kerala”.*

*“We who live in the forests are blamed for everything. But all good officers know that we will never willfully destroy forests. Our life is dependent on it. But even I am accused of many forest crimes”.*

*“Actually the EDC should be strengthened. All protection work should be done through the EDCs. People should be made to feel that it is their responsibility. And they should benefit out of this programme. The best way to do this is to have a separate Forester for the Ecodevelopment Programme. He should be relieved of the regular forest working and should be given the power to take decisions and function freely and non-formally”.*

### **Aruviyan, Son of Vilwan Kani**

***“The leadership should come from within the people. We should become stronger, self reliant, not wait for external help...”***

He was one of the first men we met at Podiyakkala in connection with this study and instantly took a liking to him. It was raining heavily on that day, – a typical summer thundershower and we spend an hour with him in an abandoned little shed at a small junction inside Podiyakkala where three trails meet. He was a strong and happy man then, full of hope and gratitude about everything in life. He reminded us of his father and as we talked a strong bond developed between him and us. He said he would help us to complete the survey. He told us about the trauma of uprooting from the riverside Chemmankala and the difficulties the big family had to go through in the new resettled area. *“However, now we are better off. I have planted rubber. The land has been divided among my brothers and sisters but we are managing it together. I have married Vasantha from Kallupara. We have cleared some forests in Kallupara also. So there is*

*enough land to somehow survive". But what when his two children, Mathan and Mathi grow up?*

*"This shop (referring to the tiny thatched shed) belonged to me once. I used to run it well and provide everything the people wanted. But as we are all poor, I cannot refuse giving provisions to my people on loan. Often they are not able to pay for it. I fell into debt because of my own kindness and had to abandon the shop. Another young man took up running the shop for some time. But he was cheated by the forest officials and beaten up. Now the shop remains closed".*

Aruviyan although young is a religious person, an ardent devotee of Agasthya. *"Every year I go to Agasthyarkoodam on a pilgrimage after 40 days of strict penance. This year I am taking my 11 year old daughter also with me".*

Aruviyan was critical about the EDC. *"It is a very good idea, but nobody has really understood it. I don't want to co-operate with the programme. It has only brought conflicts and disharmony in the community. Our Moottukani's son is the president of the EDC. This instead of solving the problem has only made the conflict worse and irreversible. It has virtually divided the people of Podiyakkala and has only increased greed and selfishness".*

According to Aruviyan, *"the leadership should come from within the people. We should become stronger and self reliant, not wait for external help in terms of finances or any other means".*

That was the first and last time we met him and often wondered where he was. Two years later we met Aruvi, his mother at Chemmankala. It was she told us that he committed suicide by eating a poisonous fruit. He used to drink heavily and his wife had quarreled and left him, taking away the children. *"He died out of love and loneliness,"* the sad and angry mother said. *"He was such a strong fellow and worked so hard on the land, but had taken to drinks".*

### **Sukumaran Kani**

*"The lazy, the casual, and the ones who came last got only very little land, very bad land".*

Sukumaran Kani is a passionate man, nearing middle age, but young in spirit. He has very strong and clear notions and opinions about everything in his life and world. So we spent a lot of time with him on many occasions discussing very many things. Sometimes there were others also listening and participating and the conversations emerged as group discussions. So there was a remarkable openness on all opinions aired.

Sukumaran Kani got the beautiful fertile valley land at Podiyakkala from his father's sister, Mathi who had no children. Her husband also died early. She was in Attumpuram

when the dam came and lost all her land and crops. Sukumaran was at Meenankal (Ottakkudy) then and does not know how much land his aunt lost there.

*“I have had a hard and sad life. My parents had seven children, two girls and five boys. I started doing all hard work even before I was hardly 12 years. I used to work in the land of my brothers and sisters. I was very good at farming. I loved it. The crops I tended used to come up very well and there was always enough to eat. But my own life never flourished however much I worked”.*

*“I married Radha from Arathonikkuzhi near Vilappilsala. She is a mental case, cannot do any work, but only talks. I have no peace of mind at home. We have two children, a girl and boy, studying in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> standards at Meenankal School. I have some land in Meenankal which I got as my share from my father. I have built a house there on my own without anyone’s help”.*

At Podiyakkala, Sukumaran Kani has built a nice house which also he constructed on his own for about Rs.25,000/-. *“I come to Podiyakkala daily to tap rubber and tend the land. I get 2 rubber sheets daily. At Meenankal, I have 220 rubber trees. I used to have all food crops here before I fell ill with a heart complaint. Now I am unable to work as before. Still I do the maximum possible”.*

Sukumaran Kani has good land at Podiyakkala and his piece of land is even now a model farm with maximum crop diversity. He has sorghum, black gram, red gram, banana, lots of vegetables and fruits, coconut, arecanut, pepper, ginger, turmeric etc. in addition to rubber. *“I have lived 18 years in Podiyakkala and have harvested gold from this land. But now I am ill and unable to do any work”.*

*“The tragedy that has happened to us is that youngsters are lazy and disinterested in physical work. They seem to have lost the vigor to live meaningfully. At the same time they are not able to cope up with the outside world. That is why you see the land deserted and without crops. Rubber is actually a lazy man’s crop. Even that work is done by women. The young men just while away their time without any shame and their mothers feed them, clothe them and give them pocket money”.*

*“Rubber is not a viable crop, I know. But if the Rubber Board did not come here with their subsidy, forests would have encroached into the Kani houses. The Kanis would not respond or take any initiative to make some positive change in their lives. I believe we can actually cultivate something despite wild boars. Even between the rubber trees you can plant a lot of other crops. Since I had tended my land well, I can now depend on it even though I am ill and unable to do hard work. I want my children to continue this tradition”.*

Sukumaran Kani had very strong notions about the severe problems faced by the Kanis and the possible ways of mitigating these problems. *“Of course the government is also to be blamed. They keep on giving us some pittance all the time, with promises of more. Thus we are spoilt and made lazy and disempowered. All the self-reliance and self-*

*sufficient life we had has been lost. Dam displacement also has contributed to this disintegration”.*

*“Can’t you see? There is no life in this settlement. There is apathy and some gloom everywhere,” he said sadly.*

*“I try to teach my children the joy and value of working in the land. In 1996 the Panchayat gave Rs.12,300/- for a house. I spent Rs.25,000/- and built this house myself”. It is a strong and beautifully built house, but what is lacking there is the love and warmth of a family living in it and the collective happiness of a community settlement.*

Sukumaran Kani had always been close to the Forest Department and hence he knows the functioning and philosophy of that Department, both the positive and the negative sides.

*“I have been a Forest Watcher at Bonaccord for twelve years from 1984-96. I have done all work in the Department, fire line work, coup work, construction work etc. I have even worked in the EDC canteen at Athirumala for Rs.4,500/- per month for two seasons. Only for one and a half months, we get fire line work. Now even for that they prefer to have outsiders. We Kanis are not like other tribals or the plainspeople. We are proud and upright and never show undue respect to any one. Why should we? Most of the forest officials don’t like this nature of ours. So there’s always ego clash between us and the officials, which is deleterious to both the forests and us. I have worked in the Medicinal Plant Conservation Area (MPCA) in the same river basin near the Bonaccord Estate also for some time. They know my honesty and sincerity very well. But still I was framed with a false case and even badly beaten up by the Range Officer”.*

About the Eco Development Programme also Sukumaran Kani has his own very definite views. *“I am all for the EDC. It should be strengthened and made to be a useful project for the forest and for Kanis. People are suspicious. You can’t blame them. That’s what life has taught them, never to believe in the authorities. The EDC gave banana saplings free. Each cost Rs.3/-. But the people refused to take it because they were expecting cash. Most of it got spoilt. People feel cheated all the time”.*

*“I used to attend the EDC meetings. Now I don’t. Forest officials should meet the Kanis at least once in three months, explain things to them and clear all their doubts. They should talk frankly and gain our confidence. This is what is lacking”.*

Sukumaran is very much aware of the complex problems in the community and the ‘Tragedy of the Commons’ always making things worse. *“People destroy natural resources unnecessarily – cutting trees for collection of some fruit or bark, setting fire to forests and so on. Many feel that unless they collect maximum, others will take their share and destroy the resources. This is a very bad trend among all impoverished people. This insecurity I feel is the result of the trauma of displacement”.*

*“Resettlement in this area has been haphazard without any plan. People came on their own, cleared the forest and built their huts and settled themselves as they pleased. The*

*PHED people came with their box like houses at least two years after most of us settled here. The lazy and the casual among us came last and got the worst land and the least land. Some of the families who resisted the displacement till waters started rising also came last and got poor land. There are a lot of other discrepancies also. Families with only a few members are still able to somehow manage with the land available. But the large families are suffering most. Formerly land availability was not a problem for us. We used to move about and settle down as we please, where we please. Whenever some one got married, we'd have a small hut made for the new couple. Now we are prevented from spreading and the Sanctuary Laws restrict our forest resource use also”.*

*“The Forest Department is responsible for the destruction of natural forests in this area. They don't know the value of 'harithakavanam' (evergreen forests). They used to have extensive coupes for clear felling natural forests and conversion into plantations. Luckily they stopped it during 1982-83. Otherwise there wouldn't have been an inch of good forests up to the Agasthyarkoodam. They had started cutting forests from Boundary Mukku. They planned to cut 6000 ha. of forests. Luckily it stopped. But they planted the whole area with eucalyptus. It is a tree that has desertified the whole area. After eucalyptus they planted Acacia and then Albizzia. Both are ecologically destructive and economically a big blunder. Albizzia is worse than Acacia. Now they are planting Mangium which is not good even as firewood”.*

*“All these monocultural plantations are dry and do not have any undergrowth of useful plants for the animals or man. Only wild boars multiply in these barren plantations with Lantana thickets. Our life becomes all the more impossible”. We had a serious discussion with Sukumaran Kani on the possibility of restricted culling of wild boar through the EDCs and sharing of its meat among the people equitably. He had clear plans of revegetating the useless plantations with indigenous species of useful trees with soil and water conservation measures. “This real afforestation should be entrusted with the EDCs. This alone will save us and our forests”.*

But what is happening is just the opposite of the humble but possible dreams of people like Sukumaran Kani. *“This year the Water Authority closed all the shutters of the dam and the water level rose four metres. Forests on the margin of the reservoir got destroyed. It is heartbreaking to see the dead and dying trees standing in water. Even the reservoir margin which we could use safely to fish has been destroyed. If they increase the height further, a few more houses will go under water. Life will become more unsafe here”.*

### **Srikumar, Son of Parappi**

***“This is our forest too. It is not we, but the Forest Department which has destroyed all the forests in the name of development”.***

We met him several times in Podiyakkala, a weak young man, on his way to collect 'chittipanam' (micro-credit money) from women – a savings programme he himself is running. He also has a sale of soaps which he gives on credit. He had run a little shop

near the rubber-processing unit in the middle of the settlement. Others told us that he had provided tea for the labourers who cremated the elephants for Forest Department. Later when he went to collect the price of tea, the forest official is supposed to have badly beaten him up. This led to the unfortunate incident of a forest fire and the rift between the officials and Kanis of Podiyakkala.

We did not enquire about the mishap to Srikumar but just let him talk about things in general. His shop remains closed even now and obviously he unable do any hard work. So he has taken to the micro-credit and soap distribution work for a living.

Srikumar's father, Aruviyan Kani died 15 years ago of a heart attack. Aruviyan Kani was employed in the PHED as a watcher and had died in harness. His mother, Parappi got the job after years of appealing and running from pillar to post.

Srikumar is one among the seven children his parents had. He has two elder brothers and the four sisters.

*"We were in Attumpuram where we had enough land and rich agriculture. I never knew hunger or poverty then. But after coming here, it has been hell, one tragedy after the other".*

*"We planted paddy here in the first few years. But within a few years, the soil got so degraded that nothing grows or yields anymore. Now we have about 2.5 acres undivided land for the eight of us. We have also planted rubber and a few bananas. That is all. It is bad land. Although my father was close to the PHED, he never bargained for more land, which as a big family, he was entitled to get".*

Srikumar is on the whole cynical about the Ecodevelopment Programme of the Forest Department. Naturally he is still bitter about the way some official treated him and cheated him of even the cost of tea he had provided for the labourers.

*"I was once a member of the seven member Executive Committee of the EDC. I remember a big meeting at Peppara where the DFO and many others were present. Our hopes were raised and all of us had assembled with a lot of enthusiasm. But the lower staff presented a pack of lies to the higher officials. The Forest Department had formerly dug five wells. They are all in areas where they are not needed, on the side of the stream. The families living in the higher areas even now have no easy access to drinking water. The staff claimed that they had cleaned five wells. But actually they had cleaned only three wells".*

*"They had actually promised us that a boat will come to fetch us to Peppara for the meeting. But after waiting for the boat, when it did not come, we had walked. They didn't give us even water. But in the report, they claimed that a boat and food were provided for us. I really got angry on hearing this. Not that we want their food or charity. But I cannot stand this sort of deceit. So I questioned and many others joined me. The forest officials got quite offended about this. That was the beginning of the end*

*of EDC. They talk of participation and people's support, but actually they still want to cheat us and plunder the forests and make profit from any project".*

We were sitting in the EDC office at Podiyakkala while Srikumar told us about his views and experiences. *"Look at this building! How badly they have constructed this, with poor quality timber and very weak and thin walls. This won't last even five years. At least they could have built a proper hall for the EDC which could have been used by us for our functions. But the forest officials don't even consider us human beings worthy of real development"*.

Although cynical about the Forest Department, Srikumar is a social worker in his own way. He is a member of the 'Sai Bhakta Sangham' who come to the settlement once in three months or so with medicines, clothes, food items and so on. The day we met him, he was supervising the cleaning up operation in front of the MGL Centre for the communal birthday feast of Satya Sai Baba. There was going to be a medical camp, a feast and distribution of provisions and clothes. There would also be a value education class for children and variety entertainments.

Srikumar was vehement about the value of this sort of programmes. *"It is better than the cheating of politicians or the Forest Department. At least we get some benefit. And for a day we are all happy and there is a festive mood. Otherwise we have no entertainment here. We feel as though we are in a jail. We are made to feel bad about cutting a few poles for the shed we are making for the programme. If the forest officials see this they are sure to file a case against us or beat us up. But this is our forest too. And it is not we, but the Forest Department which has destroyed all the forests in the name of development"*.

### **Mathan, Son of Mallan Moottukani of Podiyakkala**

***"Who knows, who among us will take this 'Mayavidya' to posterity?"***

We met Mathan at his younger brother, Saikumar's house and later several times in his own house. A young but 'illiterate' Kani, Mathan is a spiritual healer, a 'Shaman'. He has a stammer when he talks, but he has in him all the knowledge, both modern and ethnic, and a deep spiritual power. While we talked to his father Mallan about old times, it was Mathan who interpreted his father's incomprehensible words for us.

Mathan must be in his early forties married and with two children, a boy and a girl. His wife is Santha from Alumkuzhi, a village that got submerged in the dam. Santha has studied up to the 5<sup>th</sup> standard and even now loves to read. She was most eager to read the storybooks we brought for their children, whereas Mathan could only look at the pictures – that too upside down! Santha's education got disrupted by the dam displacement.

Mathan is a happy and carefree person, but very serious when it comes to ethics and truth which *"is the basis of Kani culture. It is the truth of the forest in which we live. We*

*should not flout it. Forest is truth and we can only live in truth. Otherwise we will be cursed”.*

*“We were in Cheriad where 25-50 acres got submerged. The whole settlement did not drown, but we were forced to leave. It will be impossible to live with a huge water body all around you. It is a curse on the land, whatever you may say about development and benefits to the city people”.*

*“We came here in 1983. My father resisted the displacement. He didn’t believe in taking compensation for life and wealth destroyed which cannot be compensated with anything. Actually our land did not get submerged there. All their calculations are wrong. These engineers!” he laughed.*

*“Even now there are lots of fruiting trees there, jack, mango, cashew which we had planted. But we hardly go there. Where’s the time? And life is a one-way journey. There’s no going back,” he became sad and philosophical.*

*“The first year after the commissioning of the dam in 1985, the Forest Department and the Kerala Water Authority (KWA) convened a meeting at Peppara. Sree Varkala Radhakrishnan chaired the meeting held in the building of KWA which later became the Wildlife Sanctuary office. My father being Moottukani was specially invited for the meeting. Being the eldest son, I went in my father’s place. It was a big meeting in which Ministers like Nooruddin and Viswanathan were also present”.*

*“It was a hilarious affair. Everyone was talking big big things. I was given a high position in the meeting. The forest officials went out of the way to please me. I was getting quite confused by their behaviour”.*

*“The forest officers told me in that meeting that we, Kanis and they, the forest officials are like younger and elder brothers. They asked us whether we were not happy that the whole place is becoming a Wildlife Sanctuary? Fifty of us will get permanent jobs, they said”.*

*“They told us that they would release deer in the area. They intended to release crocodiles and otters in the reservoir. They thought it would be a big tourist attraction. The Minister was doing most of the talking. I opposed this move. I know how dangerous it is to release crocodiles in the reservoir. We have the Neyyar crocodile blunder which gives us enough lessons. But they refuse to learn. I had heard a rumour that they were planning to release crocodiles in this reservoir also. So I was ready with my opposition”.*

*“After one month they released eight Sambar deer in the island inside the reservoir. It was Nooruddin minister who did it. They have increased in number”.*

*“The Fisheries Department released Tilapia and Cutla in the reservoir. The Forest Department people are catching this fish regularly. We are not supposed to fish in the*

*reservoir, as it is a Sanctuary. But we do set nets and catch a few for our own use. They don't prevent it. But outsiders are not allowed to fish”.*

*“Formerly our river Karamana had lots of varieties of fish – kallangari, elameen, kariyada and so on. Fishing used to be our favourite past time. We used to use lines, our special baskets (kodamba, ottal etc.) to fish in the river. Now it is all gone. The river itself is gone, dead and buried in the reservoir”.*

Mathan is a Shaman, a healer cum oracle in the community. He is very good at singing their spiritual song called ‘chattu pattu’ and performing their religious rites and rituals wherever needed. He is also a ‘manthravadi’ (one who performs witchcraft) and is called to other settlements regularly to perform ‘chattu’ and other rituals. When asked whether he will impart this spiritual knowledge to his son, Mathan said laughingly, *“No, this cannot be taught. This is ‘mayappaditham’ (learning through spirits). There are two kinds of education and learning. One is ordinary education where the teacher’s knowledge is increased whenever he imparts it to others. But the knowledge or craft that God imparts to a person in dreams cannot be taught to another person. If I try to do that, I will lose my power and knowledge. Our ‘chattu’ and ‘manthravadam’ (witchcraft) are there as inborn qualities in certain children. This gift is expressed very early in childhood. They may not be good in ordinary studies. But if they are able to go round with elders who have this power in them, they will be able to become ‘shamans’ when they grow up. Those children who have the inborn inclination or taste for it will learn it on their own...”*

*“Who knows who among us will take this ‘mayavidya’ to posterity?”* he laughed as he got ready to go for his next session of ‘chattu’ in some settlement. He showed us his ‘kokkara’ (metallic musical instrument needed for ‘chattu pattu’ that lasts the whole night or even days sometimes) and other small items used for the rituals and started off on his long lonely walk over the hills and valleys to the far away Kani village.

## CHAPTER IV

### IMPOVERISHMENT RISKS – THE QUESTION OF EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The detailed personal interviews and group discussions with all the displaced families and most of the grown up individuals regarding their perceptions and memories of their past life in the land that got submerged in the Peppara reservoir, the process of displacement, resettlement and their life in the new area described in the previous chapter provide valuable qualitative information needed to analyze the situation. Though these cases are micro-level investigations, they represent the macro level effectively. All the families displaced by the dam have been met and interviewed.

Originally 44 families were displaced from the Karamana River Valley from 11 Kani hamlets. The families have expanded, daughters have been married off to other settlements, married sons have built their own huts and some old men have moved off from the families as hermits, staying in separate huts or in tree top shelters. Now there are 74 families, or rather houses. Twelve in Chemmankala, two in Chathancode and 60 in Podiyakkala, all derived from the original oustees.

Care has been taken to select the detailed oral testimonies and present them in an objective manner so as to represent the entire spectrum and the whole community, from elders – both men and women, families where both husband and wife talked to us together, young women, young men who have taken up social responsibilities and leadership, and a few children who have grown up in Podiyakkala. A few women-only families have also been interviewed in detail.

The perceptions of the Kanis about the ecodevelopment programme of the Kerala Forest Department in the Peppara Sanctuary, which is meant to ensure participatory forest protection and ecologically sustainable development of the people in and around the Protected Area were recorded in detail. As it is, this is the only available composite programme for tribal development within forests. And at least conceptually it is a very viable development programme that can be initiated in a tribal settlement inside a Wildlife Sanctuary taking into consideration existing legal and procedural constraints. Hence stress was given to get as much information as possible from the Kanis about the programme.

A fairly holistic picture of the complexities and subtleties of the sensitive issues concerning forced displacement and resettlement of a forest tribal community emerges from these oral testimonies. Many unforeseen dimensions of the process of displacement, resettlement measures, payment of compensation were brought out. The current socio-economic, cultural and ecological status of the displaced people was also revealed through these intimate interactions and extensive individual and family-wise surveys.

In the personal interviews, group discussions and family-wise case studies of the displaced Kanis of the Peppara dam, most of them are quite honest and explicit about the facts and often exact figures of what they lost forever and what they have now, which could be verified by repeated cross checkings. In addition to all the modern conveniences like tap water, electricity or transport facilities, health care and good education for their children that they deserve, they also dream of regaining some day the feeling of security, richness, physical well being and inner contentment of life in the forest. This is especially true of women. *“It is peaceful and safe, cut away from the heat and hatred, squalor and ill health”* that they have glimpsed in the city. They know that even the water we drink in the city in spite of it being from the dammed Karamana River is *“poisoned with bleaching powder”*. The rush and tensions of the urban life seem meaningless to them.

Yet they have also been forced to abandon many good things they had enjoyed for generations. They have redrafted their life for a precarious balancing act, for an almost impossibly delicate set of adjustments, some of which is motivated by a sense of mission and responsibility. They reiterate, *“We have to live, we want to live, somehow we must adjust to the frightening changes that is shaking up our lives”*. And they have definitely gone on living in some semblance of order and harmony even after 1983. They have opted for rubber cultivation and daily wage labor in the forest plantations. A few women have tried housework in the city. One girl from Chemmankala has even gone abroad to the Gulf as a ‘servant-maid’. Some men have even tried their hand as manual labourers in the Trivandrum city and suburbs. But as one of them said, *“We never doubted the viability and happiness in our ‘malajeevitham’ (life in the hills)”*. The fact that they have survived for so long and that some have even created some material wealth should not be interpreted wrongly to state that they do not need any rehabilitation or development. The plight of the women-only families provides a yardstick, which could be used to measure the impact of uprooting and the inadequacy of official resettlement measures.

In examining their narratives, it is necessary to place them in ecological, socio-cultural and historical frames from which they initially emerged, and to comprehend the manner in which the narrators and their listeners understood the narratives within that particular context. If the narratives are removed from the context in which they were constructed, their meanings and the manner of understanding tend to get altered.

All the narratives have been collected during the last four years (2000-2004), almost twenty years after the displacement in 1983. So it is clear that the intense experience of individual and collective uprooting and the loss of their lands which are dearer than life itself and the destruction for ever of all the material means for their living, is still haunting them every day. The feeling is raw, ever present.

Some of the Kanis used heart wrenchingly poetic expressions for describing the beautiful land and the life they had and the acute violence of the dam on the river and on the forests they always considered their own. Only very few of them refused or hesitated to return to that intolerable experience in the not so distant past. The experience of utter helplessness and terror, and the ever-present feeling of uncertainty even now hang like a

pall of gloom over them. While a few did not want to discuss the experiences of that period in any great or specific detail in the initial interviews, references to that period came up in all routine conversations.

As Warren (1993) has documented the violence suffered by the Mayan people in Guatemala, the period of terror, of displacement, can be used here also as a temporal marker. References to the period of displacement were formulated within a temporal idiom – ‘before the displacement and displacement, during displacement and life after’. Here there is the additional threat of yet another displacement. Most of the Kanis were willing and eager to tell their story in their own unique and characteristic way. This willingness as well as the still live expectations of justice are reflected in the openness of responses and kindness to provide any information sought in my informal interviews with them. Some were always willing to talk for hours even giving up their daily chores of going to the forest to collect tubers or tending their rubber or other domestic chores. People from neighbouring houses would join in when they got to know me better. Only two Kanis, one a mentally challenged old woman with a despondent and lost look, and a very ill old man, did not give me their oral testimony. There were also some shy young boys who slithered away on seeing me, probably because they were afraid I might ask why they have stopped their studies.

However it is unlikely that the overall experience of the despair and sense of loss they have gone through and their fears and anxieties about an uncertain future can ever be documented fully. This is more than a mere methodological problem. It has to do with the inability of our minds to understand how a tribal, whose links with the land and nature are emotionally deeper and profoundly more spiritual than ours, experiences the total severance from the very organic foundations of life. As Perera (2001) puts it poignantly, “The narratives of anthropologists and sociologists describing the human experience of suffering and dispossession will always have gaps, in terms of experience, perception and the nature of the pain itself”.

However, the narratives I have condensed for this report seem to suggest that people wanted to remember that period, or could not forget. This is particularly significant in situations where justice in the physical or legal sense has not been achieved, or may never be achieved. And the legal or official process ideally entrusted with delivering justice has itself been severely subverted.

## **1. Trauma, Uncertainties and an Insecure Future**

The prospects of leaving all that is familiar and known and being forced to venture into the unfamiliar and unknown, is always traumatic for any human being. It is especially so for insulated forest dwelling human communities who have not been exposed to the outside world. A new location always means new problems to solve and unfamiliar conflicts to confront, which most displaced people are specifically psychologically not equipped to.

The feeling of utter helplessness and the fear of a gloomy uncertain future were expressed by most women. The daily life chronicles of Podiyakkala Women have a deeply disturbing, cumulative effect. It actually points to the very impossibility of an economically viable, socially harmonious and just future for them and their children. No matter how normal their lives might seem on the surface to others, they know that they can never escape the dam that devoured their land and all that they held dear. Most of them are in constant fear of yet another uprooting and some other official decrees curbing their traditional rights and freedom to live as they used to. Their lives are impregnated by the tragic presence of the dead forests and the dammed river. They all clearly foresee the end of their accustomed and desired way of life. That is why Radha talked of the “*restlessness or permanent oscillations*” in her mind and Aruvial lamented that “*all the good and all the truth are gone forever*” from their lives.

Sitting and recording their discussions, often I myself have felt the most explicit proof of a communal experience of the trauma and the uncertainties the Kanikkar have gone through during the displacement from their land. The narratives in the section ‘Voices of the Oustees’ variously presented as “I / We / Women / Mootukanis / Young men” etc. carry the weight of a community of sufferers. It is a poignant counterpoint to official discourses that relegate dam displaced sufferers to the ‘past’ and to convert it into a man and resource management issue or reduce it to a Law and Order problem. As stated in most of the interviews, the total loss of their way of life, their bonds with the land and forest, their love for the river and their joy in the simple healthy living in the hills cannot be compensated for by anything else.

The trauma and helplessness experienced by the Kanis, especially the old women can be compared to the sufferings of women in Japan after the Atom Bomb. As Hayashi (1967, 1980) brings the bomb back to the most bodily realities of women’s existence, shying away from more abstract or theoretical formulations, my accounts are replete with women’s own physical and spiritual perceptions of the Dam that devastated their lives and put on end to their free and wandering secure life. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, “The female, to a greater extent than the male is the prey of the species”.

During the course of the interactions with the displaced Kanis, one could encounter a lot of suppressed anguish and despair expressed by most in a heavy dragging silence or a sad wilted all-knowing smile or sometimes in black humour. Behind these unquantifiable and often difficult to record in words subtle expressions, there are real powerful emotions which need to be taken into account for documenting correctly situations involving the study of human suffering. One reason for this persisting despair and angst is perhaps the victims’ fear that the immediate painful past may repeat itself. Some of them are really wary of strangers asking questions. It is difficult to trust strangers after living through a situation in which they lost their life’s security provided by their live river, their forests full of food and other resources. The beauty and harmony of lives lived close to nature which they had subconsciously taken totally for granted was shattered and then what next?

Another reason for their misgivings in expressing their perception is that those who have not experienced what they have would not understand or may not care. There is a strangeness to others' experiences, especially of violence and loss, that has made many victims feel that their listeners simply cannot understand. Hence they keep their silence and sufferings to themselves. As the Peppara dam displacement demonstrates, the oustees perceive themselves as a deeply aggrieved community. They are not sure that the misfortune is over. They feel threatened by the nightmare of a future series of uprooting, by Forest and Wildlife Protection Laws, by the raising of the height of the dam and so on.

Our previous experience in the area and friendship with some of the elders and the young leaders in the community helped to overcome to some extent the initial fear they naturally have towards researchers, journalists, officials etc. Gradually more and more people became willing to talk even about their experience of terror.

## **2. The Ecological Cost**

The Peppara Dam was executed with the intention of providing drinking water to the Thiruvananthapuram city and suburbs and as such did not benefit the Kanis who have been living in the submergible area of the dam. It was least beneficial to them both at the individual level as well as at the community level. The water from the Peppara reservoir is being let out through the Karamana River itself periodically to augment the Aruvikkara reservoir which then supplies water to the capital city. In addition to submergence of several Kanikkudies in the reservoir, at least six Kani hamlets have been stranded near the banks of the reservoir. In addition to Podiyakkala, which is the officially resettled hamlet, Podiyam, Kombodinjal, Kamalakam, Chemmankala I and II and Chathancode are the settlements which are adversely affected by the reservoir physically and ecologically.

According to most of the respondents in the survey, 44 families living in 10 hamlets were displaced by the dam in 1984. The hamlets are Attumpuram, Mannidinja Karikkakam, Kundari, Alinkuzhi, Cheriad, Mlappara, Maruvappara, Kalimukhom, Pruthikuzhi and Chemmankala. Among these Cheriad and Chemmankala had submerged only partly. But all the families living in these hamlets were forcefully displaced.

Several families had resisted the forceful displacement, but ultimately practically all had to shift to Podiyakkala in stages. Two families of 'Moottukanis' cleared forests on their own and settled in Chemmankala. They did not accept any compensation from the authorities for the houses and crops they lost. They have built their own huts, raised crops and slowly their families have expanded and more people have moved in. Chemmankala is now a well-settled Kanikkudi on the fringes of the Peppara reservoir. Yet the trauma of getting flooded out of their homes is poignant in their mindscape. One elder, Vilwan Kani, now no more (not interviewed for this study) used to lament, "*The whole place used to be like the presence of a Goddess of wealth and well-being. But now see... only the eucalyptus and the dam are there. It has become evil and the feel one gets is that from an ugly witch*".

The ecological collapse of a live landscape wherein first the core, the forested river valley gets inundated, and then the remaining forests gets opened up, suddenly deforested and converted to sterile monocultural eucalyptus or albizzia plantations is difficult to assess or scientifically document fully. The impact is irreversible and the adverse effects are felt in the microclimate, hydrology and ecology of the area and also on the health of the people living close by.

An assessment of the ecological impact of dam submersion is not considered the direct objective of this particular study. Yet it is difficult not to notice the deleterious ecological impact of the dam in the surrounding forests. They are fragmented, degraded and have dried up because of the changes in the regime of temperature, humidity, air currents, runoff and other physico-chemical and biological processes. The large artificial water body that inundates all the low-lying valleys with the best forests absorbs and reflects sunlight to the surrounding areas all through the day. During the night, the heat energy absorbed by the water body is released resulting in the overall drying of the surrounding lands and the atmosphere. The diurnal rhythm of humidity change is disrupted. There is also the incalculable damage to the flow of the river downstream from the dam. This drastically affects all the life forms in the river. As water is let out from the Peppara dam periodically, there is periodic rising and lowering of water level in the river and drastic changes in water flow velocity. This affects the river bottom and the riverbanks. This results in uncontrollable erosion on both banks whenever flooding happens and drying up of the land when water is not let out. No land can withstand these extreme oscillations. All life is affected. Water availability and agroclimatic conditions downstream are affected. This results in changes in the landuse, the cascading effects spread far and wide.

### **3. Landlessness and Homelessness**

Most people have a strong attachment to their homes, especially when they are in ancestral or traditional lands. Even for a community that changes their settlements along with the cycle of shifting cultivation, like the Kanis, their hearth and the home range are very special and sacred. In the case of most of the Kanis of Peppara they had reached their forest hamlets prior to the displacement around 50 years ago after shifting from many other areas. This was mainly due to plains' people moving into their land. Kanis moved in search of seclusion and rich, yet ecologically not fragile forests. They had already settled down and the Forest Department had demarcated their 'forest settlements'. A whole generation of people had grown up in these settlements when they were uprooted. The forced abandonment of their houses and land obviously was traumatic. This cannot be mitigated by government housing or by getting small pieces of land somewhere.

From their oral testimony, it is clear that sometime in recent history the Kanikkar had diverged into two streams. Some opted for a more settled life closer to the villages outside forests and a small number of them had consciously sought the refuge of forests. The latter group of people call themselves 'Malankanis' (or true Kanis). Unfortunately it was these families who were uprooted by the Peppara dam.

Human displacement may be an inevitable consequence of some developmental projects. Its full costs may be incalculable, yet the social costs are very significant although very rarely acknowledged. Unfortunately the only cost that is recognized and computed is the cost of providing alternate housing or some land. The PHED is supposed to have had a proper Resettlement and Rehabilitation Plan (R&R Plan) for the oustees of the Peppara dam. But as this study reveals, the displaced Kanis were forced to fend for themselves with minimum compensation. There was a haphazard resettlement of some families. But practically there was no rehabilitation of the community.

According to the ‘Vikasana Rekha’ of the Vithura Panchayat (1996), the Water Authority and the Forest Department were supposed to have earmarked 110 ha. of land in the Podiyakkala area for the displaced people. But the PHED could acquire only 50 ha. of land from the Forest Department. According to Saikumar, President of the Podiyakkala EDC, *“the independent survey for the EDC confirms that we have only about 39 ha. with us. 9 ha. is allotted for institutions like the Balavady...”*.

Kathiran Kani and Saraswathy also describe the way the authorities cheated them on the land allotment. *“They intended to give 5 acres (2.3 ha.) of land for each of the 45 families ousted. But later when the Forest Department resurveyed the boundaries and put the jandas, they cheated us of our promised land. They actually did not properly allot the land to the families, nor did they specify boundaries. Most of the families did not get even two acres of land. No one got 5 acres. Only a few families who were close to the forest officials, got good land. Those who came on their own to this place before the actual resettlement took place also chose better land”*.

**Table 8**  
**Area of Land in Possession at Podiyakkala**

Area	No. of families
10 – 20 cents	1
21 – 30 cents	1
31 – 50 cents	15
51 – 90 cents	5
1 – 1.99 acre	5
2 – 2.99 acre	16
3 acre	1
Total families	44

Source: KFD (2000)

According to the Micro plan of the Podiyakkala EDC (KFD, 2000), only one family among the 44 families they have studied has more than three acres of land in their possession. Fifteen families had around 31 – 50 cents of land and sixteen families had 2 – 2.99 acres. (Table 8)

The present study, however, found that the majority of the families had less than one acre of land with them. Most of them were reluctant to disclose how much land they actually

had, partly because boundary demarcation was done arbitrarily by the KFD. All the families have informally partitioned the land for their married children. Most of them did not use the land optimally or efficiently. Some families have land elsewhere in other settlements inherited, obtained as dowry, gifted by relatives or purchased.

Land in a tropical country like India is more than a resource base. It has greater symbolic value and gives status to the owner than its mere market value would indicate. More than any other modern conveniences or money, land is the people's most valuable asset. Not only does it enable them to cultivate both food and cash crops for survival, but also it is often considered to be sacred. For the tribal people land is the treasure of the ancestors, the currently living and the yet to be born children. Often vital ingredients of the local cultural or religious beliefs and customs are closely associated with land. (Butcher, 1970).

Landlessness, as well as displacement, among tribal people is caused by acquisition of land by the government. This has very serious social and economic implications not only for the displaced people who legally owned or used those lands but also for their families and others indirectly dependent on these lands. But the destruction or alienation of forestlands cultivated by those with traditional and customary rights is not given due consideration when the government looks at the problem of landlessness.

Land given in exchange for land acquired is considered a viable solution to redress the problem of landlessness, but often may not be practicable or economically viable. For example, each oustee family of the Sardar Sarovar Project is entitled to five acres of land. This is one of the strengths of its R&R Policy, and also its weakness (Thangaraj, 1998). Enough land is not available for this purpose either in the same command area or in areas that are considered to be part of forest land closer to places where the tribals live. Another issue not considered by the authorities is the fact that traditional people may not be willing to move from their land to a 'developed' area with more conveniences and amenities. Thangaraj (1998) describes the case of the Upper Krishna Project where displaced people refused to move into a resettlement site that the Government of Karnataka had chosen. He also mentions the failure of the R&R Programme of the Upper Indravati Project in Orissa. The quantum of land provided got reduced over time, and still more with the promulgation of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.

A qualitative land capability assessment was done in the resettled Podiyakkala hamlet. The area is undulating and rocky. A number of small tributaries of Karamana River, both seasonal and perennial flow through this land. The whole area was a mosaic of natural evergreen, semi evergreen forests in several stages of ecological degradation brought about by the shifting cultivation of the Kanis, clear felling and conversion into monocultural eucalyptus plantations by the KFD and the KFDC. The dam construction and the reservoir filling also had their negative impact on the forests. The land that the displaced Kanis got as compensation has been further degraded by the Kanis themselves. All the natural vegetation including reeds has been removed and all natural trees lopped and bark ringed so that they will die off soon to make way for other crops.

Once the natural tropical moist forests are destroyed, the exposed fragile soils get washed off in the heavy rain, exposing the rocky substratum. The repeated exposure to alternating rain and the heat result in the process of lateratization and mineralisation of the soils which can be seen everywhere in Podiyakkala. During the last five years, the whole area has been converted to rubber which has further degraded the soils and destroyed the water retentivity. So even those who have an acre or more of land complain about the lack of soil fertility and crop loss during summer drought.

Housing is a basic human need and the loss of houses resulting from forced resettlement against the backdrop of an altogether uncertain future has an exceptionally deep traumatic impact on the displaced. This affects the aged, the women and children most. When families are made homeless and relocated, they are separated not only from their land and sources of livelihood, but also from their long established social and community systems (Thangaraj, 1998). The resettlement of the displaced in a manner that the risk of homelessness and related issues are properly addressed, is therefore, a prerequisite to their rehabilitation.

Some studies (Ravindran, 1995, Thangaraj, 1998) have shown that the quality of construction of the houses built by the displaced people is by far better than those found in host villages. In some cases like in the Upper Indravati Project, this was possible because resettlement was a participatory process. The Kanis are a people with great skill to build beautiful and comfortable houses with bamboo, reed and mud with thatching made of reed leaves. The houses the PHED built for them were asbestos roofed and were quite unacceptable for them. For the first few years since they got the house, we had seen them housing their goats and keeping their firewood inside these houses way back in 1985-86 and living in a lean to or veranda made of reed. In Podiyakkala there are a few houses built later by the Kanis themselves with funds from the Community Development Block, which are of far more superior quality than those built by the PHED. The houses of Devaki, Sukumaran Kani etc. are examples of houses built in 1996 with Rs.12,300/- as grant from the Panchayat. Sukumaran Kani's house cost him only Rs.25,000/-. He built it all by himself with some help from other Kanis. It is a strong and aesthetically pleasing house. Radha's house which she herself built with the Rs.12,000/- she got from the Panchayat is a tiny hut, but with a large veranda made of mud bricks with reed leaf thatch. She did not have any money to put in but the whole family put all their efforts to build a comfortable house that has elements of both the modern and traditional Kani architecture.

#### **4. Right to Information**

The Kanis of the submergible area of the Peppara dam were not taken into confidence before the initiation of the River Valley Project. The news of the construction of the dam came suddenly as a shock to the people. There was no question of any discussion with the people who would be directly affected. Mallan (Moottukani) of Chemmankala is vehement about it. *"They decided everything before informing us. They thought of building the dam at Plankudy. But when I came to know about it, a few of us went to the*

*PHED office and protested. Later they changed the site to Peppara after the confluence of two of the tributaries of Karamana River, Thodayar and Velliar”*

Several others also complained of not being warned about displacement until the dam was completed and submersion was imminent. Most women were in the dark about the threat of displacement. Those who knew and those who participated in the struggle against the dam were the ones who suffered most.

They had no idea where they would be resettled and how much compensation they will receive. Aruvial, wife of Vilwan Kani puts it most poignantly *“They told us we would be provided everything except mother and father. But in the end we had with us nothing but our body and our life. Everything else was lost”*.

There was quite a lot of confusion about where to resettle the oustees of the Peppara dam. At first there was a rumour that they will be given land in Anchumaruthumoodu near Pattankulichapara which is near the road from Vithura to the Peppara dam site, close to the edge of the forest. Except two enterprising families, no others preferred to be near non-tribal people or close to the main road. Even after deciding on Podiyakkala, the Kanis were not officially informed about the resettlement plan. Even before the dam was plugged and the land got submerged, a few families shifted to Podiyakkala, cleared forest and built traditional reed huts near water sources. Slowly others started moving in and it was only two years after the last family had shifted that the PHED built some houses for them.

It is important to note that most of the project-affected people in India have little or no prior intimation about the dam submergence or displacement. In the case of the Rihand project in Madhya Pradesh, the State agency was not even present to warn the oustees of the rising water which threatened to drown them in the middle of the night (Singh, 1985). A similar picture is presented by Karve and Nimbker (1969) in the case of the Koyna Project, by Bhanot and Singh (1992) in the case of the Pong dam and Singh and Samantray (1992) about the Nagarjuna Sagar Project, to cite a few instances.

## **5. Eligibility**

Family was considered as the unit for giving compensation and resettlement. The family was defined as all those living under the same roof. As can be seen from the oral testimonies, this was detrimental in the case of large families and where families lived jointly.

Kanis had lived a free life in the forest without demarcated properties until the 1970s. Then gradually their shifting cycles were restricted and they were forced to ‘settle down’. They were not given ‘pattayams’ but a fairly large area was demarcated for them to shift within. They also enjoyed certain rights for forest resources for their own use and marketing. But gradually forest laws and wildlife protection laws became more strict and exclusive.

In many tribal families where there are a number of grown up unmarried sons and daughters, the resettlement measures of the Forest Department was leading to severe hardships. Such families when displaced suffered more than smaller families or younger newly wed families who had on their own cleared land and built separate huts even before the Forest Department's resurvey for settlement began.

Vilwan Kani's wife Aruvial who has eight children got only 50 cents of land, that too after her husband's death. Her husband Vilwan Kani, the Moottukani of Chemmankala at the time of displacement had refused to take compensation. *"Now after dividing the land among the eight children, each have got just enough to put down a hut. That's all. But how will they live,"* Aruvial asks.

The Vikasana Rekha of Vithura Grama Panchayat (1996) reports that "there are only 29 houses built by the PHED in Podiyakkala but 52 families survive there. There are more than 200 people living there. But they have only one Panchayat well".

As the oral testimonies show, the displaced people were informed by the authorities that land will be allotted to them in Anjumaruthumoodu near Pattankulichapara which is right on the periphery of the forest and close to the dwelling places of outsiders. Only two families were positive about this suggestion and all the rest of the displaced people opposed this move. Podiyakkala was the second choice. Even before the dam was completed, a few enterprising men had gone to Podiyakkala and with the help of a forest watcher (guard?) cleared forest, built huts and shifted their families in advance. Obviously they are better off even now than most others as far as the quality of the land they have is concerned. A few families had resisted displacement and refused to accept monetary compensation for the loss of their houses and crops. They came last to Podiyakkala and did not get good land or houses. The present Moottukani of Podiyakkala, Mallan's family, Bhagavathy's family are some of the families who got only poor land and got no houses built for them.

Later the Forest Department and the Vithura Panchayat had built a few houses for them. A few wells were also dug. But the really needy families who live far away from the stream do not have easy access to drinking water.

## **6. Loss of Common Property Resources**

Though the resettlement package of the Peppara dam had attempted to compensate for the loss of individual property and crops, there was no attempt to compensate for the loss of common property resources. As all dams block rivers and flood fertile valleys, the displaced populations would lose access to flowing water and other living resources from the river, as well as the alluvial river side soil and easy accessibility across terrain. They would also lose common property resources such as forests, grasslands and wetlands from which they derived not only subsistence resources but also marketable commodities. The site where they were resettled does not and cannot replicate the earlier access to the river or pristine forests. As all the Kanis stated emphatically, *"it is neither possible, nor*

*even proper to attempt to compensate for this incalculable loss in our lives in monetary terms”.*

As stated earlier, the Kanis used to collect diverse Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) such as fish, small animals for food, honey, tubers, fruits, mushrooms, other edible plants, medicinal plants and so on for their own consumption and sale. When the richer valley forests go under water and the remaining forest ecosystem gets fragmented and degraded, the availability of most of these items gets reduced. They are then compelled to travel longer distances in search of these materials or forgo the range of NTFP, being forced to depend upon the degraded or more vulnerable ecosystems. They are thus sometimes forced to inadvertently destroy the resources and the ecosystems further, or altogether abandon their use, thus getting more impoverished. Laws regarding Protected Areas in the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary also have curtailed their trapping, fishing and gathering of bioresources from the forests.

Saikumar says, *“three years back the Forest Department gave us a list of 111 medicinal plants with the purchasing and selling prices. But suddenly they are quoting a Government of India directive and restricting all collection of NTFP in the Sanctuary”.*

During our discussions with the Kani women we recorded that they collect at least 10 varieties of tubers from the degraded semi-evergreen forests and eucalyptus plantations around their settlements. They are *“Neduvan, Nooran, Kavala, Chengu, or Karivellikizhangu, Pinnan, Nedunooli, Mukkizhangu, Chathankizhangu and Neduvanmattu”*. These wild tubers have become scarce in the forests and as the forests degrade and become drier, it becomes difficult to locate the climbers and dig deep into the earth for the tubers. And there are always plenty of wild boars competing for the wild yams. Women who are the gatherers of food find it difficult to dig in the parched and hard lateratized soil. A few of the good yams which give plenty of tubers throughout the year like the ‘chengu’ are found in the evergreen forests only. It is easier to dig for them. The women were especially keen about regenerating the ‘nityaharitha’ (evergreen) nature of the forest ecosystem which would provide them their staple food, medicinal plants and several other produce for sale.

The Kanikkar identify several varieties of wild honey which they collect for personal use, treatment and for sale. All of them say that the availability of honey is becoming less as forests degrade and the monoculture eucalyptus and acacia plantations replace natural forests. The change in their landuse patterns particularly expansion of rubber also has adversely affected the quality and availability of honey. Plant diversity drastically gets reduced in the rubber cultivation areas. *“Cheruthen, Kolthen, Thoorkuten, Kurinjithen and Thoduthen”* are some of the varieties of honey they collect. The elders describe several varieties of highly medicinal cheruthen and many other varieties with the names of respective flowers from which the bees collect the nectar (for example kurinji then). *“With the disappearance of the ‘pachakkadu’ (evergreen forests), all this richness has also disappeared for ever,”* they say.

Kanis used to get a great variety of wild edible fruits from the forest. Gooseberries, wild mangoes, wild jamun (*Eugenia* sp.), wild jack, moottikka (*Baccaurea courtallensis*), anjili (*Artocarpus hirsute*) are some of the common edible fruits. The displaced Kanis who are in a degraded environment do not have access to most of these wild edible fruits which used to provide them nutritious, medicinal and tasty food.

The Kanikkar mentioned collecting at least 20 varieties of mushroom and several varieties of medicinal plants which they commonly use for minor ailments. Adalodakam (*Adathoda vasica*), Seethathali (*Pothos* sp.), Padathali (*Cyclea peltata*), Garudakodi (*Aristolochia* sp.), Oda valli (*Gnetum ula*), Arogyapacha (*Trychopus zylanicus*), Sathavari (*Asparagus racemosus*), Kolinji (*Alpinia galanga*) are some of the frequently collected medicinal plants.

The Kanikkar told us about the many varieties of medicinal plants they used to collect for sale. Women used to do most of the collection of the medicinal plants for sale. But now they are scarce and difficult to dig up. Santha, daughter of Kali, collects 'Vayanappoo' (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*), tubers of 'Padathali' (*Cyclea peltata*) and 'Sathavari' (*Asparagus* sp.). It takes laborious effort to dig them up, clean them, dry them and then there will be very little to sell. One will have to take it to the Vithura Tribal Co-operative Society or Kottoor Society. But then one gets very little for such a lot of effort, often not even for bus fare. 'Vayanappoo' and 'Padathali' fetch Rs.50/- for kg. One kilogram of arecanut fetched just Rs.4.50/- last season. The Kanis of Chemmankala and Chathancode have comparatively greater access to NTFP than those in the resettled Podiyakkala. The plants they collect are 'Pachottipatta' (*Symplocos* sp.), 'Nilappana' (*Curculigo orchoides*), 'Kattu kurumulagu' (*Piper* sp.), 'Danthappala' (*Wrightia tinctoria*), 'Kadukkappoovu' (*Terminalia chebula*), 'Kalluvazha' (*Ensete superbum*), 'Kattu vettala' (*Piper* sp.), 'Kurunthotti' (*Sida* sp.), 'Thanni' (*Terminalia bellerica*), 'Vellapine' (*Vateria indica*), 'Kunthirikkam or Thelli' (*Canarium strictum*) etc.

The Micro Plan of the Podiyakkala EDC (KFD, 2000) identifies only seven Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) collected by the Kanis. According to this document, 'Thelli' (*Canarium strictum*), Honey, 'Kudampuli' (*Garcinia* sp.), Gooseberries, 'Kattu kurumulaku' (*Piper* sp.), 'Vayanapoo' (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*) and 'Ponnampoo' (*Myristica* sp.) are the only species collected. The Micro Plan states that 4224 bundles of firewood, 264 small timber, 3600 bundles of reed leaves, 25 bundles of reeds are collected by the Kanikkar. They plan to reduce this forest dependence further and provide permanent houses, smokeless choolas, gas connections etc.

The Agasthyamalai Ranges are exceptionally rich in biodiversity as the range of material still being collected by the Kanikkar indicates. The knowledge of the Kanikkar regarding the flora and fauna of the forests is remarkable and it has helped them survive for so long in these forests. Waves of encroachments by outsiders, large scale deforestation by the Forest Department, several dams and displacements, release of extensive forests for non forestry purposes etc. have drastically reduced their resource base, pushed them up the hills into ecologically fragile environments at higher elevation, undermined their agro base and impoverished them totally. Yet they survive partly due to their knowledge and

skill, perseverance, frugality and endurance and also because the forests they live in are still rich. Hence any measure aimed at sustainable and equitable development of the Kanikkar should also aim at restoration of the ecosystems and the rejuvenation of their traditional agriculture. But unfortunately this is exactly what is neglected in most cases of tribal rehabilitation.

Of the 47 river valley development projects involving tribal displacement studied in detail by IIPM (Sing and Banerji (eds.), 2002) only two acknowledged the cost of common property resources lost through the development project and attempted to compensate them. The official documents of the Bisalpur and Upper Kolab Projects promised to compensate in kind the loss of common property resources. But the local activists and the project-affected people disputed this claim. The study group in any case was not able to assess the adequacy of the compensation. Yet it remains a major hidden and incalculable social cost for most dams.

## 7. Loss of Familiar Social and Geographical Surroundings

Communities, especially tribal/forest communities have a strong social ethos within which individuals grow and are shaped. Similarly the physical surroundings within which a community lives have a profound influence on the psyche and lifestyles of its members. The climate, terrain, ecosystem and even the types of flora and fauna, all shape the thinking and behaviour of individuals and communities. A drastic change of physical surrounds can seriously disorient individuals and communities. When the change is to ecologically degraded surroundings, there are additional deprivations, inputs from a bleaker landscape, especially for an evergreen forest community like the Kanis who had lived in direct dependence on the natural ecosystems.

All the Kanis interviewed, young and old, men and women, lamented the loss of the heavenly setting of their old settlements on the banks of Karamana with rich forests all around. As the names of their settlements (now under the reservoir waters) indicate, they were mostly near the rivulets feeding the main river or on the banks of the river itself (Attumpuram –stream bank, Mannindinja Karikkakam – where the soil is eroding) or near forests (Cheraid – small forest) or on the rocky shore of the river (Marukalpara, Mlappara).

Mallan Mootukani of Podiyakkala was of the opinion that they would never have chosen Podiyakkala to settle down. *“It is closed on all sides like a pit,”* he says. Being a jhooming community who have lived in the evergreen forests of the Agasthyamalai Ranges, they have to be practical ecologists who not only have deep and accurate knowledge about the flora and fauna of the area but they know better than anyone else the ecological limitations and potentialities of the area. Their shifting cultivation cycles would have had very scientific and precise timings and physical settings. Having such sound ecological sense, the areas they select to build their huts or cultivate would also be optimal for the purpose. Once abandoned their jhoom plots would regenerate to secondary forests quickly. They would never have selected an area so susceptible to wildlife depredation like Podiyakkala to settle down or cultivate. Many of them feel that

the area is like a corridor for wild animal movement and now they feel permanently threatened. The notification of the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary gives total protection to all wildlife. This also contributes to increasing wildlife depredation.

## **8. Adverse Impacts on Physical Health**

The change in climate, availability of food and water and the psychological trauma of getting uprooted from familiar surroundings seriously affect the health of the displaced people.

Even when they are relocated to a nearby forest area, as in the case of the Kanis of Peppara, the proximity of the inundated valley and the large water body results in adverse ecological impacts in the entire surrounding area. Those who are forced to live near the reservoir talk of how oppressive and unhealthy the area is. The large water body i.e. the reservoir absorbing heat during the day and letting it out during night actually dries up the whole area and the plant communities change in a very short time. The water body reflects heat and light during daytime like a huge mirror and this also contributes to the drying up of the air column above the reservoir and the hill slopes close by. These microclimatic changes have not been documented although the forests and agriculture suffer and the Kanis state it again and again. This is experienced by all who have had to shift their life from the bank of a river to the sides of an artificial reservoir.

The reservoir of a dam is ecologically totally different from a flowing river and a forested river valley. Humans who have adopted their life, agriculture and other livelihood activities to the natural balance and salubrious climate of the river valley know how to live without disrupting the ecology of the area. But these ecologically adapted people's physical, mental and spiritual health is wrecked when their life support systems are destroyed totally in a very short time. No natural or human community can withstand without trauma the total ecological collapse of a whole river valley dammed and inundated.

In most instances the relocation of the oustees is planned merely in the physical sense of 'relocation' just giving them land wherever it is available without any consideration being given to the preferences of the people or climatic or ecological suitability. Examples of this were recorded with regards to Pong, Bhakra and Pandoh dams where people living in the hills of Himachal Pradesh were resettled in the deserts of Rajasthan. Similarly people being ousted from the Tehri town are shifted to the new Tehri which is much higher and colder. Others being displaced by the Tehri dam have been shifted from the cool hills of Garwhal to the hot plains of Uttar Pradesh (Singh & Banerji (eds.) 2002).

The displaced Kanis of the Peppara dam obviously find it difficult to get a nutritionally balanced diet in their resettled land. The surrounding forests are either degraded or are monoculture plantations of exotic tree species from where they do not get a fraction of the quantity or diversity of tubers, fruits, honey, fish or medicinal plants they used to get from their original surroundings. Their agriculture also suffers from severe wildlife depredations. They are not able to cultivate any food crops. Elephants, wild boar and

sometimes deer destroy all the tubers and vegetables. They have been encouraged by the Rubber Board to cultivate rubber for which all other trees like jack, mango, artocarpus etc. have to be removed. No herbaceous elements or tubers or banana can be grown underneath or anywhere near the rubber trees. This is the biggest calamity regarding the food security and the healthy diet of the Kanis that has come in the wake of the dam displacement and consequent resettlement.

All the Kani men and women interviewed know fully well that converting their land into rubber is a wrong thing. Many elders had strongly opposed this move in the beginning. There are many families who resisted the conversion into rubber. They did not want to cut down all the fruiting trees which the Rubber Board insists on being carried out to get the subsidy they provide. The Kanis know that rubber will destroy their traditional agriculture which is oriented to a diverse mix of food crops, both annual and perennial. Nothing grows under rubber once it has grown. Moreover as one Kani woman remarked, *“Now that we apply chemical fertilizers for rubber, even our tapioca tastes bitter.”*

Under the wrong crops or with the loss of traditional food crops, land quality deteriorates and food self-sufficiency disappears. With wrong food and with reduced purchasing power, nutritional standards fall. This has happened to most tribal communities but in a drastic fashion to displaced and rehabilitated communities including the Kanis of Peppara.

The World Bank has recently completed a study to assess the health implications of involuntary R&R in developmental projects in India through the Society for Health Education and Learning Packages (HELP)). The study covering 8 development projects indicates that involuntary resettlement adversely affects the health status of communities. Health status of a community is a sensitive indicator of development. The study had recommended a base line survey to determine the ‘ level of living’ of the families displaced. It has also suggested guidelines for assessing the health status of the community along with strategies to enhance the nutritional status of children (Ramaiah, 1995; 1998).

The study of Ramaiah looked at 1) the environmental status, 2) the nutritional status, 3) the health status, 4) the health impact due to changes in dietary intake and 5) health impact due to changes in lifestyle as indicators to determine levels of living. All these impacts are evident in the oral testimonies of the Kanis of Peppara and in all that they have been losing out.

## **9. Adverse Impacts on Living Standards**

The economical, social and ecological factors related to displacement adversely affect the living standards of displaced people, and consequently their future prospects. Though many of the recent rehabilitation packages take into account the direct and immediate economic impacts of relocation, the indirect impacts and future prospects are never assessed. Singh & Banerji (eds.)(2002) in their study confirms this. According to them, “no mention of these impacts was found in any of the documents studied and therefore these must also be considered unacknowledged costs”.

One of the most severe problems faced by the Kanis is lack of money. Displaced and relocated they need more cash for a variety of survival needs which was not essential earlier. Resettlement, by replacing dependence on the commons and a secure and self-reliant subsistence economy, increases the people's dependence on cash and market. This naturally increases their vulnerability to debt, reducing their ability to make it through lean years. A few of the young men interviewed had mentioned about the debt trap they had fallen into. An oustee had to 'sell' the land he got in Podiyakkala to another Kani family to pay back a debt. There are instances of serious illnesses or police or forest cases that have forced them to borrow money from other Kanis, officials etc. and unable to repay them. A people who have always shared all that they have with others of their community and anyone needy, people who never knew what economic indebtedness means quickly fall into the vicious cycle of borrowing money and giving away valuable resources cheaply for repayment, getting more and more impoverished and indebted and losing hope of coming out of this cycle altogether.

Parasuram (1994) describes the plight of the Sardar Sarovar Project oustee families, four fifth of whom were forced to take loans in the 8 years after displacement began. Families who were unable to give back the loan had no choice but to sell what little assets they have and ultimately their most important asset, their land.

#### **10. Loss of Preferred and Familiar Sources of Livelihood**

The forced change of occupation, place and methods of earning a livelihood, as often happens when people are displaced, is a source of incalculable impoverishment and trauma. When forced displacement occurs, it is never possible for the oustees to continue with livelihood methods they are familiar with or choose any in keeping with their abilities and interest. There is the additional trauma of having to adopt a livelihood for which they are neither trained nor suited for. To become a physically weak, disorganised daily wage earner in the Forest Department's very seasonal tree felling work or in plantation raising or in fire protection operations or to become an artisan selling reed products or some farm products to earn a living is self-denigrating for the Kani. It takes a terrible toll on the self-respect of an individual.

Most Kanis interviewed have undergone or are undergoing this tragedy and they express it poignantly. All the elders, both men and women preferred poverty and starvation to becoming a coolie or a forest daily-wage worker. They were sad that their children are forced to take up wage labor because according to them Kanis who are 'Mala Arasars' are rulers of the hills and have never worked under anyone or worked for money. The young men are however reconciled to their plight, and at least some of them have developed the skills to do many menial jobs. Some of them had even tried to stay in the Thiruvananthapuram city and do agricultural and other domestic help work. Although work was easy and they were paid properly, they were not able to stand the city life.

All the women, both young and old, said that they never had to go for work before displacement. They had enough to eat from their land and from the forest and river. Most

of them used to make money from their cash crops and NTFP like honey, gooseberries, medicinal plants etc. As they were healthy and happy, living in a salubrious environment, they did not have to spend money on medicines either.

The most noteworthy change one could see among the displaced Kanis is that all the women have taken to weaving baskets and mats out of reed. After days of continuous basket making, a family can earn hardly Rs.500/- a month, not even enough to buy rice. This is an occupation traditionally and almost exclusively adopted and perfected by the Samabavas ('Parayas'). The Kani people used to make mats, purses etc. out of reed for their personal use, but never for sale. They still consider it below their dignity to do reed working for survival. But unfortunately the collapse of their traditional hunting-gathering and shifting cultivation systems and the uprooting that came as the last blow have forced them to turn to the most easily available natural resource – reed for survival means. Joblessness is not only the loss of employment and wages, but also loss of employment opportunities for landless labourers, artisans, vendors and small businessmen both in urban and rural areas (Thangaraj, 1998). In tribal areas, joblessness can also be seen in terms of income earning opportunities particularly for women through collection of NTFP from forests.

In the case of the displaced Kanis of Peppara, it was evident that they were worse off than those in many other Kani settlements as far as access to information about the availability of jobs was concerned. For example, none of the youngsters in Podiyakkala even knew about the selection of tribal Forest Guards during the last three years from all over Kerala.

The only employment available for the Kanis of Peppara is what can be provided by the Forest Department. During the fire season (February – May) the Forest Department employ firewatchers to clear fire lines, patrol the fringes of the forests and put out fires. Traditionally the tribals (here, the Kanis) are preferentially employed for this arduous work, as they know the forest area well. But unfortunately during the last few years, more and more non-tribals are being given this job, leading to serious conflicts and ill feelings. In addition to fire watching, the Forest Department provides sporadic work in their tree plantations for weeding, replanting, thinning, felling and loading timber on to lorries. The impoverished Kanis, especially women find it extremely difficult to do the physically arduous forest plantation work. Most other employment opportunities in the Sanctuary, e.g. guides in ecotourism, running of canteens etc. have been usurped by non-tribals. Even among the Kanis, the families in Podiyakkala are left out of all these opportunities. They are cut off physically from the location of work. Psychologically they are unwilling to do many types of work. Thus the opportunities of the mainstream are denied to them and the safety of the interior forest is also now lost.

## **11. Social Alienation and Conflicts with the New Neighbouring Communities**

The fact that most resettlement sites come up near other previously existing settlements can often result in tensions and conflicts between the two communities. These tensions

are aggravated when the land for resettlement is acquired through a legal process. In the case of the Kanis of Peppara, they were resettled in Podiyakkala, a nearby forest area, without titles, as a 'forest tribal settlement'. Although the Podiyakkala area was not occupied permanently by Kanis earlier, obviously the forests and reed beds were used by both Kanis and Sambavas living in neighbouring areas. We have encountered several men belonging to the Sambavas, a Scheduled Caste community who are traditionally reed workers, in and around the Podiyakkala area. Often they go deeper into the forest for collecting reeds. Traditionally there was never any conflict or competition between the Kanis and these people over forest resources. Reed resources were available everywhere even outside the Reserved Forests and Kanis needed it only for building their huts and making a few household items. But in the present deteriorating conditions of the forests and the Kanis, there are more and more Kanis who are taking up reed working. Most of the women of Podiyakkala earn some money by selling reed baskets in the Meenankal or Vithura markets. For many families this is the only source of income. Kanis are also seen cutting the last strands of reed beds for this. The expansion of rubber in Podiyakkala is also a threat to the reed beds. Often when natural forests are cleared, reed or bamboo comes up as the ecological healing or regeneration mechanism in nature. But when the area is planted up with rubber or any other cash crop or tree plantations is raised, the reeds and all other plants are systematically removed in the process of weeding. This naturally leads to the drying up of all the streams in the entire area. Reed is a plant that grows well in wet and swampy areas and near streams and it cannot survive in the changed drier conditions. One can expect in future competition and even conflict between the Kanis and the Sambavas when reeds become scarce.

## **12. Loss of Infrastructure and Access**

In those locations where the rehabilitation sites are far away from other human settlements, there may not be problems with the host communities but there is the significant factor of physical isolation and loss of the social infrastructure (Singh and Banerji, (eds.), 2002). In the case of most of the Kanis of Peppara, the access they earlier originally had to facilities available in the region like nearness to roads, schools and markets are not so easily available in the new site. Those who lived deep in the forest had access to natural resources without competition and salubrious surroundings to live in. In the new area they feel deprived of both the natural as well as material resources. All the Kanis of Podiyakkala complained of the lack of road access to their settlement. Unlike the Kanis who live in the inaccessible forests, these people feel threatened by modern diseases and emergency situations that would need transportation to Vithura town or even Thiruvananthapuram city. As it is there is an old jeepable coup road that takes a circuitous route skirting the reservoir. This becomes partly inundated by the reservoir waters during the monsoon and it traverses elephant country. There had been several instances of man – elephant conflicts and at least four men had been killed during the last two years. There is a shorter (6 km.) path from Anchumaruthumoodu which the Kanis use to go to the market. Children have to walk at least 6 km. to reach the school at Meenankal via this path. This road goes through undulating forested terrain and the Forest Department has not given permission to widen the road, or build the two culverts to make it motorable. They do a bit of road clearance work every year but refuse to give

clearance for a proper tarred road. Peppara being a Wildlife Sanctuary, the Forest Department does not want to open up the area.

According to the Kanis their EDC or some such authority could protect the road with a check post at the entrance to prevent unauthorized outsiders from entering the settlement. This is also not acceptable to the authorities. Naturally the Kanis feel threatened and caged in without any optimism for the future, for themselves or their children. Now that they have all become rubber and other cash crop cultivators, they would need to transport their products to the distant markets. Unlike the Kanis of yesteryears who could walk any distance across hills and vales, the present Kanis need vehicles and fast comfortable transportation.

Many young men and women had to stop their education when they were uprooted and resettled in Podiyakkala. In addition to the trauma of uprooting, they also suffered from disruption of education. In the new unfamiliar place the children lacked confidence to walk the long distance through elephant country to the school at Meenankal or at Anappara.

In recent rehabilitation packages access roads and infrastructure have become an important consideration. Of the 47 projects studied by IIPM (Singh and Banerji, (eds.), 2002) there were provisions for amenities like schools, dispensaries, roads and community centers. However the adequacy and appropriateness of these amenities could not be determined by the researchers. For example the Central Water Commission (CWC) itself had reported that provision of amenities in the case of the Telugu Ganga Project (Andhra Pradesh) left much to be desired (CWC, 1995).

### **13. Role of other Development Agencies**

The Kanikkar being a proud and exclusive ethnic group, have never allowed any political, religious or social service group to enter into their community, influence their mindset and create conflicts. Thus there has not been much religious conversions or party politics among them. But of recent, partly because of the collapse of their natural resource base, the series of displacements from their territory and externally imposed restrictions on their survival activities, a feeling of hopelessness and insecurity has crept in. This socio-cultural crisis is exploited by religious groups like Vanavasi Kalyan Kendra, Christian religious groups, Satya Sai Bhakta Sangham etc. to make inroads into their hamlets with medical camps, supply of clothes and provisions, help for education and so on. A few Kanis have entered into party politics and one has even become a Panchayat President, but their real cause has not been taken up by anyone. Although the newly formed Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha did not make inroads into the Kani area, the Adivasi Gothra Sabha is known and respected by a few Kani families in the Peppara area.

Christopher (1997) reports that a voluntary agency arranges teachers at Chemmankala, Podiyakkala, Kuruvampara and Podiyam settlements to impart non-formal education. The teachers were the educated youth from the respective settlements and they were paid an honorarium by the agency. Mitraniketan and WGTDP (Western Ghats Tribal

Development Project) implemented schemes for sericulture, handicrafts, technical education for select youth in Chemmankala, Kuruvampara and Podiyakkala. WGTDP is said to have worked in the area for six years from 1992. These schemes include supply of goats and honey bees to select families. Seedlings of arecanut and vegetables were also supplied. Until the late 1990s the Hindustan Petroleum Ltd. extended services to the Chemmankala settlement under their village adoption programme. They installed water taps for their cultivation, electrified their huts and established a mushroom culture unit (Christopher, 1997). None of these so called developmental measures have taken root in these hamlets nor improved the socio-economic condition of the Kanikkar. It is only five years since these programmes were implemented, but the people do not even remember most of these measures. Obviously there is no follow up activities and the developmental measures themselves are not culturally suited for the Kanis.

Of recent the Rubber Board had come to the area in a big way and encouraged them to convert the entire agricultural lands to rubber. The land owning Kanikkar are given subsidy for planting, manuring, weeding etc. The Rubber Board had also set up rubber sheet rollers at Podiyakkala and Podiyam.

The ITDP (Integrated Tribal Development Programme) and the IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) are supposed to provide financial assistance for agriculture and medicinal plant cultivation, self-employment training courses etc. But none of these have reached the people of the resettled hamlet. The aged men and women actually do not even get old age pension which they are entitled to.

There is a S.T. Promoter (usually a young woman) working in every settlement under the Panchayat. The S.T. Promoter in charge of Podiyakkala stays at Meenankal and is obviously incapable carrying out most of the badly needed liaisoning tasks. As part of the launching of the present Tribal Sub Plan meant to enhance the food security and sustainable development of tribals, an 'Oorusabha' was convened on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2003. Various programmes have been drawn up. But nothing more is known.

#### **14. Threat of Secondary Displacement**

Given the human population in India (and Kerala, in particular) it is unlikely that displaced persons would be resettled in spaces that are empty and have no other occupiers or users. In many cases the oustees have found themselves dumped in lands that had been allotted to other project affected people or even those which were owned by other people but supposed to be acquired for rehabilitation leading to further displacements. When land is acquired legally from landowners, this would often lead to the displacement of tenants or those who do not have legal titles to the land they are occupying or cultivating. This then causes secondary displacement. At least six families in Podiyakkala and the majority of the families at Chathancode are facing the threat of secondary displacement as the Water Authority which currently controls the Peppara dam plans to increase the height of the dam.

## 15. Changes in Social and Cultural Matrix

Displacement and consequent impoverishment invariably entails range of severe consequences for a community's cultural and social well-being. One common result of resettlement is that villages, hamlets and even families are physically broken up. The 19 villages displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat have been resettled in no less than 175 different locations (Parasuram, 1994).

In the case of Peppara oustees also the hamlets and families have been shattered in spite of being officially resettled in Podiyakkala. In every household one finds members who are staying elsewhere. Some have obviously chosen to stay deep inside the forest and some have been forced to or have decided to go out altogether. One could find a whole range of symptoms of social and cultural breakdown.

Traditional large multi-family households, all living in separate houses but very near each other, have been broken up into nuclear families because compensation was paid on single family basis. Larger families with traditional values have suffered more than others and this has led to a loss of faith in their own old value systems and cultural norms.

The cultural impoverishment had meant that they could not fulfill their many traditional obligations. They are not in a position to help other members of their extended families, while their obligations have increased as they depended upon their non-oustees to help them cope with the ordeal of displacement. Disputes over the sharing of family compensation have bred distrust and bitterness in family life. Many women mentioned about this family tragedy, something very uncommon among Kani people.

The social cohesion and prestige of the displaced families have slumped leading to a lot of subtle problems. Some elder women have mentioned how in the years just after the displacement they could not find marriage partners for their children from traditional forest dwelling families or from outside. There are at least six Kanis (both men and women) in Podiyakkala & Chathancode who have married non-Kanis.

The breaking up of traditional ties and norms obviously has rendered them rudderless. Family breakups, divorces, abandoning children and families have all slowly but surely entered their world also. Most of the women interviewed were of the opinion that these problems are more among the oustees than among others whose lives and communities have not been disrupted.

Dowry, which never had been there among the Kanis, is on the increase. The families who are facing material insecurity tend to expect money and gold as dowry. Women were very concerned about this trend which according to them is "*the end of truth and values in Kani culture*". The financial insecurity and the newfound belief that money is everything and the realization that one cannot survive without money are driving the displaced Kanis to desperation. This trend has made them forget all the traditional joys and festivities, song and dance they used to have not so long ago. The enthusiasm, happiness and simple generosity and sharing characterizing the festive occasions have

totally disappeared from among them. There is hardly any village festival with nightlong singing of their spiritual songs. The whole Podiyakkala village unlike other Kani settlements is marked by some heavy sorrow. There is little left of the joy of living visible in most of the other tribal settlements however poor they are. Behura and Naik (1993) also describe the melancholy that pervades the oustees of the Rengali dam in Orissa.

## 16. Impact on Women

All over the world displacement of indigenous people from their land affects women disproportionately more severely than men. They are closer to nature, more intimately bound to the ancestral lands, attached to the relatives etc. Their dependence on the natural resources like water, fuel wood, fodder, wild edible plants and other produce from the commons is also more direct and intimate.

The pain of uprooting is poignantly expressed by one of the oldest women, Parappi, who said, “ *It would break my heart to go back and see our land when water recedes. I will never go there again*”. She described the wealth they had, “*the three plots of wetland paddy, coconut, arecanut and the countless food items from the forest*”.

Aruvial, Vilwan Kani’s wife suffered much more than others because her husband refused to accept money compensation for the land and crops they lost. She had to see her land being denuded by the forest officials for planting wild trees on the banks of the reservoir. She says, “ *Our land didn’t get submerged, but they insisted on us shifting. For a number of years we wandered without food or clothes. We became beggars overnight*”. Vilwan Kani died soon after and she says, “ *there was no land to bury him. He had not allowed me to clear some forest for a bit more of land. The 50 cents we had were divided among my eight children. After my husband’s death, in anguish and bitterness, I built a tree house and stayed on top of a ‘maruthi’ tree for one and a half years with two of my youngest children. Don’t we even have the right to lay our dead bodies on this earth?*” she asks.

The drastic change from living in rich expansive common lands in a healthy beautiful mountain country to which they belonged and which they believe they ruled as Mala Arasar, to being stabled in small individual pieces of land with no free access to natural resources affects the women most. As Radha says, “*my mind is restless and insecure all the time*”. The foundation of security given by the forest and their strong communal bonds are badly shaken.

The women-only families of Podiyakkala are obviously the poorest and the most miserable. Unlike before, there is no co-operation or sharing of manual labour or of resources among them anymore. The women have to ‘employ’ their own men to help them repair houses and do the hard work on the land. In Podiyakkala, the women from the families without any male members gather at Kali’s house at dusk which has a large veranda with their children, dogs and strands of reed to weave baskets at night in the light

of the only solar lamp available. They share their woes and joys and whatever food available among themselves. Of course food and security are shared with their dogs also.

Women in all tribal areas have important roles to play in the subsistence economy based on food crop farming, collection of NTFP and so on. Involuntary resettlement has a particularly adverse impact on the women as they have no control over the cash compensation. This is paid to the man of the family. Women have a definite role in decision making, cultural and religious rituals along with the elders. When life support natural systems are destroyed and the social systems get disrupted, the women get totally marginalized and their status and role in the community are lost forever.

The Kudumbasree and the EDCs have started a few micro credit units of women but most women have not understood the necessity of earning or saving or practising thrift. None of them have a regular income to put into their Self-Help Group savings.

### **17. Impact in Community Elders**

Traditional community elders called variously as 'Chiefs', 'Shamans', 'Mooppans' etc. always lose their hold and self-esteem when irreversible tragedies like uprooting happen to a community. They are often viewed as incapable of protecting their community. Moreover, the value systems, cultural norms or laws of social and ecological prudence get devalued with other drastic changes that happen. These very values would be accused as being responsible for the injustice meted out to them. For example a tribal community who never considered land as private property, but as commons to be venerated and shared would be considered as encroachers by the authorities and not eligible to get compensation or rehabilitation.

Among the Kanis of Peppara, one could find signs of the community itself losing its integrity as each individual or each family is forced to compete with others to somehow get a piece of land to settle down and start living, beginning from the scratch. Young men with a bit of formal education and who are better able to interact with the government officials have been forced to take up the leadership of the community. The 'Moottukanis' of Podiyakkala (Mallan Kani), Chemmankala (Mallan Kani) and Chathancode (Bhagavan Kani) feel defeated and helpless in the face of the rapid changes. They are independent and self-reliant and keep the old values and customs intact in their own lives but obviously have not been able to save the new generation from what they believe is disastrous to the Kanis as a people. For example, they are all against the Kanis abandoning all food crops for rubber in their land. Mallan Kani of Chemmankala on his own has built a tree house to stay awake during night to drive away wild animals from his field of food crops. He sincerely believes they will all starve to death without their own food grown in their own land.

The three Moottukanis of the affected villages have all aged and are becoming incapable of performing religious rites or 'chattu pattu' - their religious and historical songs. These need walking to other hamlets and singing the 'chattu pattu' throughout the night. They know that their cultural and religious beliefs, practices and rituals and their unique life

styles are dying out along with their deep knowledge of biological and ecological life support systems. Only two men among all the displaced Kanis interviewed had this spiritual power. They are regularly called to practice 'Mantravadam' (a kind of witchcraft) and perform 'chattu pattu' in all the Kani hamlets inside and outside the forest areas. The demand on them is unnaturally high and they are not able to reach all the places. Although their spiritual powers are needed and respected by the community, they cannot take the leadership or become the decision makers in the present scenario.

The youngsters still look up to the 'Moottukanis' for decisions regarding personal or religious issues, but when it comes to questions of development, they all feel that the Moottukanis are inadequate to make the right decisions. Mallan Moottukani's daughter-in-law in Chemmankala said, "*Our Moottukani lives in an imaginary world of his own. When he sees people like you, he starts narrating old stories and is very happy. When we watch the television, he starts talking loudly and tries to interpret the stories of the serials and films in his own way. Everybody gets angry with him then. Actually when he has to talk to the officials as the Moottukani of this hamlet, he has nothing to say. He doesn't know anything about the tribal development plans of the government or the financial help we are eligible to get. He does not demand the bridge, electric fence and electricity needed for this hamlet*". Vasantha, daughter of Bhagavan Kani (Chemmankala) also said that they don't approve of their Moottukani anymore. "*He is not able to understand the changes or the problems of the present,*" she said.

The experiences of the young men who have taken up social work and political or official leadership in the community are also disappointing. As Mallan Kani, who has been a sincere social activist among the Kanis of the Peppara area and the President of Chathancode EDC says, "*Even I feel reluctant to continue the work. I get blamed by everyone, both by my people and by the officials. Everything feels like a waste of time*". He feels sad that after all these years, the condition of the forest and the condition of his people have only deteriorated.

Men like Sukumaran Kani, Mallan or Saikumar have a clear vision of how their people should be helped to develop sustainably and without destroying the forest ecosystem. They know that the answer lies in genuine ecodevelopment which will rejuvenate the forests and really rehabilitate the impoverished Kanis. Practical steps like having a separate officer for the Ecodevelopment Programme, rejuvenating the traditional agriculture of the Kanis to ensure food security, and ecologically restoring the forests or plantations around their hamlets to ensure their survival means depending on NTFP and the food needs of wildlife are put forward clearly by these sincere young men.

## **18. Development that Came Along with the Dam**

Most of the dams in Kerala have come up in forested river valleys and have opened up these areas to outside forces and people. Roads to the dam sites bring along with them not only forest encroachers, but also various developmental agencies and programmes. In the Peppara area also along with the construction of the dam came encroachments all along the road from Vithura to Peppara and large-scale clear felling of forests even in the

catchment area of the dam and conversion of the areas into monoculture plantations of eucalyptus, acacia and albizzia. These plantations raised by the Kerala Forest Development Corporation resulted in massive deforestation and consequent depletion of the natural resource base of the Kanis. The Forest Department as part of a measure to check forest encroachment converted most of the fringe areas of Reserved Forests to plantations, mainly of eucalyptus. Along with the ecodegradation brought about by the dam, these monoculture plantations also degraded the environment considerably.

The whole catchment area of the dam was declared as the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary in the year 1983. The area was formerly a part of the Paruthipally Range of the Thiruvananthapuram Territorial Forest Division. It is one of the two Wildlife Sanctuaries in the Thiruvananthapuram district, the other being the Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary. Peppara Sanctuary has an area of 53 sq. km. of Reserved Forests. Portions of the Palode Reserved Forest forms its boundary to the north and west and portions of Kottoor Reserve and Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary bounds it to the south. Tamil Nadu forests across the State border forms its eastern boundary. Stringent implementation of Wildlife Protection Laws and the overall habitat management measures in the Wildlife Sanctuary have restricted the free access of Kanis to natural resources which they had enjoyed till then. As forests degraded around the tribal settlements, and as forest plantations could not provide necessary food materials to wildlife, the now protected wild animals increased in numbers and started raiding the crops, especially the tuber crops and banana raised by the Kanis leading to serious conflicts between tribal people and wildlife. Bioresource collection, fishing, trapping and hunting in the Sanctuary were strictly prevented.

Past heavy timber extraction from the forests, regular man-made forest fires, heavy grazing in some locations and lopping for fodder and mulch, removal of smaller trees for fuel, poles, expansion of monoculture plantations have all cumulatively led to severe degradation of the forests occupied by the Kanis. The Kanis who have been pushed up into ecologically more vulnerable steeper, rocky, higher forests from the plains and valleys by encroachers, development like dams etc. are forced to practise the only agriculture they know i.e. slash and burn in their settled areas which further degrade the surrounding forests and also their own cultivated land.

Most of forest exploitation measures that came along with the dam and the displacement have impoverished the Kanis. Even otherwise the Kani society was in rapid transition. Education, tribal development programmes, exposure to the outside world, films, television etc. were forcing them to abandon their tribal identity and the old ways of life. Depletion of forests and the drastic reduction of the traditional resource base were also forcing them to seek new ways of survival. Education and the changing social norms in the outside society also contributed to this change. The natural resource depletion affects the tribal women more as they are the collectors of wild edible plants, tubers and to an extent medicinal plants which were all available in plenty in the nearby forest areas. Reduction in income and deterioration of overall health and vitality of individuals as well as the whole community are obvious consequences of development-induced ecodegradation.

## **19. Agriculture – What Remains – Loss of Food Security**

Forest dwelling Kanis traditionally cultivated part of their food requirements and collected the rest from the wild. As can be understood from the oral testimonies, they used to cultivate several varieties of paddy, both wetland and dry land, diverse millets, tapioca and other tubers, banana and vegetables. They were self-sufficient as far as food was concerned. They used to collect a wide variety of edible wild plants, fruits, tubers, honey, mushrooms and small animals and thus had a healthy balanced and varied diet till recently. Most of them still recollect their complex shifting cultivation patterns and its ecological viability. They have been banned from practising shifting cultivation to protect forests. The Kanis have been induced to settle down in demarcated plots inside the forests. Slowly their viable traditional agriculture is getting modified to something very much like the intensive cash crop farming system of the settlers in the Ghat areas. In traditional tribal cultivation, conventional crops like paddy, legumes, millets and other dry cereals and tuber crops would have cultivars not found in the plains. They also change the species composition of forests surrounding their settlements to meet their food and other requirements. In Kerala this has resulted in the increased numbers of jack, mango, gooseberry and other perennial fruiting species in these forests. In the collection of biomass as well as in cultivation, the roles of men and women are different, but they all participate in all the activities. Differences are on the basis of physical effort needed for the cultivation of the particular crop or the effort required for collecting wild species.

Kani cultivation patterns have been undergoing drastic changes during the last few decades. Governmental machinery has reached out to even the most inaccessible tribal settlements introducing new crops, new seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and subsidies. There are also NGOs like the Mitranikethan which have been intermediaries in accelerating this change. Kanis are encouraged to cultivate cash crops like pepper, ginger, cocoa, arecanut, coconut and of recent, rubber. On the one hand bioresources are dwindling in the natural forests and the Kanis are discouraged from their dependence on NTFP by forest and wildlife laws. Simultaneously as forests degrade, wild animals also come into the tribal hamlets for food and water and wildlife vs. human conflict gets accentuated. Climatic change due to deforestation adversely affects agriculture and Kanis are slowly weaned off the crop tending attitude and rhythm of life.

The Peppara Sanctuary management measures give more protection to wild animals. Kanis are prevented from trapping or shooting jungle fowl or wild boar for food. Wildlife slowly increases. The monoculture forest plantations which have thick undergrowth of exotic weeds such as lantana or eupatorium are breeding grounds of wild boar. Hence, all agricultural areas close to forests suffer from wild boar depredations. The Kanis of Podiyakkala also suffer from all these ecological ills and are forced to practically stop all food crop cultivation. Tubers, vegetables, paddy and banana are all favourite foods of elephants, boar and even deer. In addition to elephants and wild boar, black naped hare, sambar deer, mouse deer, barking deer, civets, bonnet monkeys, porcupines, bandicoots, palm civets and squirrels destroy their crops, both food crops as well as cash crops like pepper, cocoa, arecanut and cashew. Birds also take their share.

All the women narrated sad stories of losing all their colocasia, sweet potatoes, elephant yams, banana etc. they had planted and nurtured with love and care. They are keen to grow their food if only their land is protected with rubble walls, trenches or electric fences. As one old Kani lady said, *“We used to carry our own seeds from settlement to settlement. But here we are forced to cook our seeds and eat”*.

In Podiyakkala, one can find varieties of pulses, tubers, banana, maize, turmeric, ginger, several varieties of small fruits etc. in all the homesteads. But during the last four years, the Rubber Board has come to the area in a big way along with NGOs like Mitra Niketan and convinced the Kanis that rubber is the only hope for them. At a time when rubber cultivation and market are subjected to drastic fluctuations which even the big planters are not able to cope up with, the Kanis have been forced to fell all the trees, both wild and domesticated to make way for rubber.

My survey of the area which began in 2000 has recorded the total degradation of the traditional agro ecosystem the Kanis had and the whole area becoming monoculture rubber fields. The survey for the Podiyakkala EDC’s Microplan which was carried out in 1999 (KFD, 2000) had recorded that the main crops of the Kanis at that time were pepper, cashew, banana arecanut, coconut, tapioca, colocasia, elephant yam, rubber etc. According to them only 16 families had gone in for rubber at that time.

**Table : 9**

**Family wise Agriculture in Podiyakkala**

Crop	No. of families
Pepper	30
Cashew	7
Banana	38
Arecanut	30
Coconut	32
Tapioca	28
Colocasia	18
Elephant yam	21
Rubber	16
Cloves	1

Source : Microplan of Podiyakkala EDC (KFD, 2000)

By 2003, all the Kani families of Podiyakkala had converted most of their land to rubber and stopped cultivation of even tapioca which had become their staple diet ever since the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Swati Thirunal Maharaja introduced the tuber in Kerala. They had a large number of their own tapioca cultivars as some of the old women narrated the names and qualities of each variety– Karimaru, Vellamaru, Manhakkottan, Koyippovan etc. They all say that they have not been able to preserve these varieties in the resettled area. *“They may be somewhere in the interior hamlets,”* they said. As the tidal ingression of

cash crops sweeps over the entire area, especially rubber, the loss of indigenous cultivar diversity the Kanis had would only increase and finally nothing would be left.

The Kanis of Podiyakkala have pinned all their hopes on their rubber now which they hope will start yielding in a few years' time. They know very well that they have taken a path of no return by cutting all other trees and planting rubber. Once the rubber trees grow up, they will have to give up all other cultivation. *"Nothing grows in the shade of rubber, or anywhere near it. Even the smell of rubber in the air is bad for every living thing, plant or animal,"* one of them remarked.

The Kani women know that they will be forced to depend totally on the market economy once they start tapping the rubber. They are fully aware of the nutritional quality of what they call as 'forest food' which has helped them remain strong and healthy. They also know of the "expensive but bad quality food in the market" which they are compelled to buy for their children, partly because of non-availability of traditional food, but also because of simple curiosity for "new and tasty food". They are afraid that their health is threatened by the new food and that they are also succumbing to modern illnesses.

Mallan Moottukani of Podiyakkala described at least eight varieties of dry land paddy they used to cultivate. He also talked of the sorrow and sense of loss he feels about the rich rice fields, at least ten acre, he had where they cultivated 'cheradi', 'aryan', 'ponnaryan', all old paddy seed varieties, now to be seen nowhere.

Some of the old men described graphically the diversity of tools, traps, lines, poisons etc. they used for catching wild animals from the forest and fish from the river for eating. Several varieties of 'choondu villu' (pellet bow), 'ambum villum' (bow and arrow), 'kuntham' (spear), 'keni' (trap) and country guns were all used to hunt wild animals till recently.

'Choonda' (line fishing), 'keni' (trap wall), 'kodamba' (fish traps) and mild poisons were used to catch fishes from the river. They described several delicious hill stream fishes which they used to get in plenty from the river before the dam. Now they have all disappeared. The traditional fishing gear are not suitable for reservoir fishing. The Fisheries Department has introduced exotic species like Tilapia, Cutla etc. in the reservoir. The Sanctuary Laws prohibit fishing in the reservoir. But the Podiyakkala Kanis are unofficially given permission to catch fish for their personal use. Some of them use nets to catch fish. According to the Microplan of the Podiyakkala EDC (KFD, 2000), the Kanis of Podiyakkala catch 2,112 kg. of fish per year.

The two available detailed surveys of the Peppara area (Christopher, 1997; KFD, 2000) show that wildlife depredation of crops is severe in the Podiyakkala settlement. According to Christopher (1997), crop damage is maximum in Kamalakom (Rs.45,540/- per year) followed by Podiyakkala (Rs.44,450/- per year). He estimates an annual crop loss of Rs.3,58,345/- in the 17 settlements inside the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary that he studied in detail for the year 1995.

Most of the Kanis of Podiyakkala know about the crop damage compensation which they are entitled to get from the Kerala Forest Department. But none of them have applied for it or have got any compensation. Christopher (1997) reports that most of the Kanis he interviewed did not know the procedure to claim the compensation. Only six families had claimed compensation and among them only three got just one fifth of the amount claimed. They generally feel that it takes a long time, involves a complex procedure and the amount paid is too small and is paid after much delay. It is at the mercy of the concerned forest staff. All this deters them from claiming compensation.

From the interviews of the study, it is clear that most of the Kani families do not have much income from agriculture. Except for a few sheets of rubber which around 10 families are able to get at present, a few occasional bunches of banana, some arecanut and pepper, none of the families make a profit or even a living out of the present agriculture.

According to the Microplan of the Podiyakkala EDC (KFD, 2000), fifteen families make an annual income between Rs.1,001/- and Rs.5,000/- in Podiyakkala, six families between Rs.5,001 and Rs.10,000/- and three families a maximum of Rs.25,000/-. There are at least twelve families without any income from agriculture or any other occupation. Their economic condition seems to have deteriorated during the four years after the initial survey for the ecodevelopment work. Ecological degradation of their land, decrease in agricultural productivity, increase in crop production costs and fall in prices of cash crops like pepper, ginger, arecanut etc have contributed to this crisis. This is applicable to all the cash crop farmers in Kerala, but in the case of Kanis, it has disastrous consequences as they have only the land and the forest to depend up on. Moreover, they are not able to compete with the plains people in the open market and get a fair price for their produce.

Traditionally Kanikkar never kept goats or cows in their settlements as they followed a shifting cultivation related semi-nomadic life. But when they were forcefully settled they started having domestic fowl, a few goats and even cows. In Podiyakkala, most of the women had a few fowl which were housed in tiny reed cages during night and allowed to run free during day time. They also feed them with termites collected from the forest.

There are four cows belonging to two families and four families keep twelve goats. Goats and cows are stall-fed and usually not let free in the forests. Cow dung is in high demand as manure and for plastering the floor of the reed huts. They reported lifting of goats and cattle by wild animals like leopards.

Thus it is seen that there is acute food insecurity caused by loss of land, livelihood and access to wild edible plants and animals. Unsuitability of currently occupied lands for traditional food cultivation, wildlife depredations and the introduction of rubber have adversely affected food production.

## 20. Education

The Peppara dam which came up in the early 1980s affected the education of several youngsters at that time. The trauma of displacement and the several years which the families needed to settle down in the new location on their own, demanded time and energy of all the members of the community. Hence schooling was impossible for many. All the young men were regretful that they had to abandon their hopes of completing school education. Only Sheela (daughter of Devaki) who was very good in studies as well as in all other extra curricular activities did not stop studies even after shifting to Podiyakkala from Maruvappara. She used to walk 20 km. every day crossing the forest and climbing ridges to reach her school in Anappara. She studied in Meenankal also which is 6 km. from Podiyakkala up to the 10<sup>th</sup> standard but she could not write the SSLC exam. She is still very sad about not continuing her studies. Even now she dreams of studying, reading and gaining knowledge. But now as a mother of four children, she has no time and no access to books. Her husband, Mohan, also expresses his disappointment in not being able to study and gain knowledge. He compensates this sorrow by getting involved in social work among his people, helping the needy and taking up their cause with the authorities. *“Thus there is a chance of meeting learned people and gaining experience and wisdom,”* he says.

There is a Multi Grade Learning Centre (MGLC) under DPEP at Podiyakkala. There is a teacher, herself a Kani from Parandode who is a T.T.C holder, at Podiyakkala teaching the children from Anganavady to 4<sup>th</sup> standard. There are about 20 children of all ages and it is a kindergarten cum primary school. The teacher is bright and dedicated and is able to impart primary education for the children which is obvious from their performance, handwriting and confidence. But as the DPEP is now in doldrums, the teacher does not get her salary regularly and there is also the threat of the MGLCs closing down. When we met her once, she had not received her salary for nine months and had to waste a lot of time going after the papers at Vithura. As it is the children are provided with food at the school. Most children go to school mainly for the food. But even this facility may be stopped in the coming years.

It is after the primary school that many children are forced to stop their studies as the next higher-level school is at Meenankal, 6 km. away and the children will have to walk through forests frequented by elephants. There are right now only 6 children, three girls and three boys going to the school at Meenankal. There are at least 14 youngsters who have stopped studies at SSLC, having failed or facing financial difficulties to go for higher studies.

There are two girls who have completed Pre Degree, one of whom has undergone Teachers' Training (TTC) who has not yet got a job and the other studying for Civil Engineering at the Lal Bahadur Sastri Institute of Technology at Thiruvananthapuram.

A few parents have taken their children to Chathancode and Chemmankala so that they can go to the school at Maruthamala nearby. The only hope for them now is the Model Residential Schools (MRS) for tribals at Katela and Njaraneeli where Adivasi children from all over Kerala get education. But the children have to pass an entrance examination to get admission in the MRS.

The Kanikkar strongly feel that once the children get educated outside, they become misfits in the community and incapable of doing any work in the forest. But without education they are unable to cope up with the demands of the changing times. Already the influence of television and all modern attractions are sowing seeds of discontent and raising aspirations in their minds while many will be unattainable. Unfortunately every attempt at improving their lot by the government programmes only results in complicating the problem. Thus it is imperative that the real leadership and the core concepts for the renewal of the community and culture must come from within the community. The government can only be a facilitator for this and should be combining traditional values and modern life strategies for a social, cultural, economical and ecological restoration.

## **21. Overall Marginalisation**

Marginalisation is an outcome of the loss of land, loss of employment, loss of home, skills and even one's own identity. It is an indication that the loss of land, the loss of productive assets and the loss of livelihood have resulted in downward mobility (Thangaraj, 1998; Cernea, 1998). Though marginalisation is often looked through the perspective of loss of livelihood, it is necessary to give attention to the marginalisation of indigenous communities, whose 'levels of living' cannot be measured merely with economic yardsticks. The plight of tribal women should be considered with priority because land acquisition, ecosystem destruction and displacement adversely affect their status in the family as well as in the community. From an economically 'poor' but ecologically and socially secure and harmonious situation, whole families are shattered and broken up and pushed into permanent destitution and poverty through displacement.

Forced displacement tears the social fabric and the existing patterns of social organization. Communities are fractioned, production systems are dismantled, kinship groups and family systems are often dismembered and scattered, local labor markets are disrupted and people's sense of cultural identity is undermined. Informal social networks of mutual help depending on blood relationships, neighbourhood links etc. are broken up. Local voluntary service sub groups within the community, self-organized service arrangements between neighbouring communities etc. are dispersed and rendered inactive. This unraveling represents a massive loss of social capital incurred by the uprooted people, yet a loss that can never be quantified or compensated. Such 'elusive' disintegration processes undermine people's livelihoods in ways uncounted by planners (Cernea, 1998).

In the resettled hamlets of Kanis, one could see a process of social disintegration set in by the displacement affecting social and kinship relations and communal support networks

that provide mutual help arrangements, labor exchange relationships and production-oriented informal organizations. Displacement has also affected their ability to manage their socio-economic and cultural affairs due to the weakening of traditional authority and leadership.

The dismantling of such multifunctional, yet virtually 'invisible' social networks through displacement acts as one of the hidden but serious causes of impoverishment. It is difficult and it takes time to reconstitute similar social structures and networks among resettlers, capable of exercising such support functions at the new relocation sites. This is a major loss of social capital that compounds resettlers' losses of physical and natural capital, man-made capital (infrastructural assets) and human capital (skills, relevant knowledge etc.) described above.

## CHAPTER V

### DISPLACEMENT – A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Development induced displacement is one of the most widespread social processes taking place in contemporary India. Its magnitude and complex consequences are only going to increase in the coming years, especially in the context of globalization and the gigantic developmental projects being taken up. The dominant paradigm of development we are following will only spawn large-scale deforestation, more extensive mining, industrialization, super highways and big dams. Water related projects such as the India River Linking Project, nuclear and other power plants, military bases etc. not only affect the ecology and the economy, they also consume the living spaces of huge populations, often displacing them out of their native locales. All this is considered inevitable, almost to be accepted unquestionably. These development projects are expected to help in agricultural expansion, industrial growth and the overall economic development of the country from which everyone is expected to benefit somehow. But it is only recently that we have started thinking about questions such as “Development for whom, development for what and development at what social and ecological cost and how long the benefits of development will continue to be available ?”

In postcolonial India, at least 330 lakh people have been displaced by the construction of more than 3,600 large dams alone. Dams are but one of the large developmental projects displacing people. The assumption that such large-scale, almost compulsive planned displacement is desirable has never been seriously questioned. It is blithely assumed that the material gains would outweigh the overall losses (including the mental trauma) to the concerned people. Without even attempting, it is stated that the displaced people can be properly rehabilitated in such a way that they can reconstruct their past social space and develop further enriched by the returns from the developmental projects. They are reminded that all these developments are ultimately for their prosperity also. Of course for the common good, some should pay and sacrifice a little.

Besides generating ‘cheap and clean power’ and storing water for irrigation, the dams are supposed to help in flood control, navigation, and supply of water to human habitations and industries, provide facilities for recreation, help expand pisciculture and so on. Most of the benefits from such projects go to the urban consumers directly or indirectly. But actually whether all these benefits accrue is a moot point. The agrarian population in the case of irrigation dams in the command area get irrigation water, but are forced to make drastic, often undesirable, changes in their traditional cropping systems. Even here it is the big landowners and commercial farmers who pocket the maximum gain. The people in the catchment areas and fertile river valleys, tribals who depend on rivers and forests have to pay heavily for this development.

A large dam across a river creates a huge man-made water impoundment. As a result there is considerable destruction of natural forests, agricultural land and often inundation of entire villages, townships, archaeological sites and the like. At the same time, there is considerable reduction in water availability downstream, both in the river and in the

groundwater. Impacts of the impoundment include destruction of freshwater fisheries, loss of fertile silt brought down by the river and reduction in fertility of soil in the flood plains. There could be saline water intrusion upstream from the sea or backwater, increased soil and water acidity due to absence of leaching and increase in pollution level as dilution through river discharge is curtailed.

The ecological cost of each large dam is incalculable and the plight of the oustees is tragic and socially and economically in most cases irredeemable. At the time of project formulation, the cost-benefit analysis is intentionally heavily biased. It underestimates the costs and exaggerates the benefits. In most cases such an exercise is done only to justify the construction of the dam in question. There is never any estimate or plan for resettling and rehabilitating the oustees. If such an estimate is made, all such socially unjust mega projects would also become economically unviable.

The most tragic and unjust part of the social cost of large projects in India is that 40-60 per cent of the dispossessed people are tribals and dalits (Fernandes & Thukral, 1989; Thukral ed., 1992; Reddy, 1993; Roy, 1999). The situation in Kerala is not very different. As all our hydel dams came up in forested valleys in the Western Ghats, they would have displaced the Adivasis living therein and destroyed their life support systems. Except a study by Murickan et. al, (2003) which attempts to collect all available information on development induced displacement in Kerala, there is no first hand documentation of the plight of the project affected people of Kerala. It is in this context that the present study on the impact of dam displacement on the Kani tribal people of Peppara was conceived.

Unlike in the case of many large dams in the rest of India where several lakhs of people are displaced and rendered landless and totally impoverished, Peppara dam built to augment the dam at Aruvikkara supplying drinking water to Thiruvananthapuram ousted only around 45 families in 1983. The Project had a rehabilitation plan whereby the PHED acquired forest land from the KFD to resettle the displaced Kanis. In spite of these positive points, the story that unfolds through the personal interviews, oral testimonies, family-wise case studies and group discussions shows how complex the issue of uprooting is especially when it comes to the case of indigenous or ethnic tribal groups and how impossible it is to properly compensate or rehabilitate people uprooted and dispossessed in the course of the development.

One of the chief characteristics of tribal communities is their eco-geographic embeddedness. Their identity is heavily influenced by the hill area or forest or river valley where in they are found. The relationship between the tribal people and their area of habitation leads to a whole range of social, cultural, spiritual and ecological configurations which are so delicately balanced. Hence they can never conceive of a break from their ancient moorings. Even the tribal communities which are migratory in character or those who follow a ritualistic belief in changing the sites of their villages after an incidence of death or epidemic, or even a jhooming community like the Kanikkar follow a well-defined pattern of movement within a specified area. Their movement is not haphazard shifting. Such a bond between the tribals and their milieu discourages random shifting even among individuals. Till the 1940s most of the tribal heartlands in

India remained free of industrial or any other developmental activity. A deliberate State Policy of non-interference left the tribal communities insulated and undisturbed in their own areas (Saksena & Sen, 1999).

The country's era of planned development was initiated in the early 1950s. The main objective of the Plans was a concerted effort towards higher productivity and greater equity. The foci of all such developmental efforts were mostly natural resource rich regions, many of which are in the hilly and forested areas, inhabited by the tribals. The uprooting of people, especially tribals, and the destruction of their natural resources caused by this State sponsored planned development have been enormous. India is well known as "a developing country with the largest dam construction programme and correspondingly with the most massive involuntary dislocation" (Cernea, 1991).

Despite the obvious suitability, cost effectiveness and sustainability of traditional decentralized water harvesting and water use systems, they are not given any consideration. In a slowly growing city like Thiruvananthapuram, all the natural springs, wetlands, wells and ponds that had assured free pure sweet water for the entire population have been totally destroyed while introducing the centralized water supply system bringing water from the far off Aruvikkara and Peppara dams. Studies conducted by the Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS) show that the Peppara reservoir has already lost 22.5% of its storage capacity due to siltation. Peppara dam reservoir with a gross storage capacity of 38.4 million cubic metres and a waterspread area of 8.496 sq.km. goes dry every summer creating panic in the Kerala Water Authority (KWA) and anxiety among the public.(NIE, 2003). Simultaneously the justifiable water needs as well as the criminal water-wasting habits are increasing uncontrollably.

There is a plan to install radial gates across the spillways of the Peppara dam which would raise the FRL by 6 metres and thus provide additional storage. But this would result in further inundation of forests and secondary displacement of Kanikkar at Chathancode and Podiyakkala settlements. However, the Peppara dam is expected to be able to provide enough water to the city only till about 2020 at the current rate of use of 214 million litres a day (Hindu, 2003). The Peppara reservoir had got filled up beyond FRL and had overflowed in the heavy rain of October 2003, but the KWA points out that this is because the reservoir is heavily silt laden. The actual amount of water stored in the reservoir would be much less than desired (Hindu, 2003). This actually shows that the life span of the dam is already curtailed by several years. This is true for all the major dams in India.

A 1990 World Bank paper on watershed development concluded that in India, erosion and reservoir sedimentation are not only severe and costly, but also accelerating (Doolette & Magrath eds., 1990). The average life span of large dams in India has thus been reduced to 30-40 years. Yet in spite of all the social disruptions they cause and economic and technical failures, dam constructions are an ongoing phenomenon in India and in the world at large because of a variety of politico-economic reasons. Of course there are powerful vested interests behind large construction activity.

However, despite the involvement of major financial organizations like the World Bank and the IMF in such projects, the worldwide protests by environmentalists, voluntary organizations and the millions of project-affected people have led to a more critical thinking about large dams and alternatives to such major projects are being experimented with in many parts of the world.

In Kerala, the Peppara dam in the Thiruvananthapuram district was one such multi-purpose river valley project for supplying the much-needed drinking water to the capital city. Later a mini-hydel unit has also been attached for generating electricity. There were several locational advantages regarding the site of the dam and it was completed within a reasonable span of time. It was to augment the storage capacity upstream of Aruvikkara dam which had silted up and started to go dry by summer.

There is no comprehensive data from the pre-construction period giving details of people who are displaced later. This makes impact assessments incomplete. That as much as 40 percent of Project Affected Persons (PAPs) in India belong to the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes (GOI, 1962; 1984) makes it even more difficult to collect information on their socio-economic conditions. They would not have records or may not know accurately to recount to some one from outside what they had and what was lost and what was given. The dismal state of rehabilitation and the even greater paucity of evaluation studies on rehabilitation make it difficult to conclude anything on the basis of hard data.

The worst aspect of large dam projects is the social and cultural upheaval. Thousands of people have to shift to some new, sometimes unknown destinations which might be topographically and culturally vastly different from their own. Revival of their economy and reconstruction of their past social space is an impossible task. Resettlement efforts of the governments worldwide are dotted with dissatisfaction if not complete failure (Goldsmith & Hildyard, 1984).

### **Social Dimensions**

In the initial phase when the proposal to construct the dam was declared, most of the Kanikkar whose land would go under the reservoir did not believe it. Although not reported in the media, nor supported by any environmental or social activists, there was a strong movement of protest against the dam and the consequent displacement from among the Kanis of the area. This was led by several tribal elders, some of them 'Moottukanis' of the hamlets that were to be submerged. They did not get any notification about the acquisition of land or imminent displacement. Most of them learnt about it by hearsay. A few PHED and forest officials had informed them that they will have to move and that waters will devour their houses and land.

The Moottukanis say that the engineers had planned to construct the dam at Alumplangudy which would have displaced many more villages. They had gone on a peaceful, yet strong agitation against the initial plan. They talk of going to the PHED office several times, going on Satyagraha, to stop the construction of the dam. Women talk of the hardships suffered, hunger strikes and processions to the State Administrative

Head Quarters with their traditional bows and arrows. All this had resulted in shifting the dam site further downstream to Peppara in the main Karamana River after the confluence of Thodayar and Velliar. This they consider as the biggest success in the otherwise losing battle they were forced to wage against the insensitive authorities. They often talk of how some among them had helped in the initial surveys and data collection for the construction of the dam. As the whole operation was hastily carried out as an emergency measure for alleviating the water crisis of Thiruvananthapuram city, the construction of the dam was a foregone conclusion and the work had started without any feasibility studies, cost- benefit analysis or environment impact assessment.

All the protests and peaceful agitations by the Kanis were countered by the authorities, mainly the Kerala Forest Department, mostly by persuasion. Promises were made of sufficient compensation, land for land, house for house, and offers of all other developmental and rehabilitation measures. The PHED had promised to build model colonies with modern facilities and adequate economic subsidy for rehabilitation. However because of severe protests from the tribal elders and a few leaders, including women, most of the families did not show much preference to shift to non-existent 'resettlement colonies'. There were strong differences of opinion regarding some of the resettlement sites suggested by the Forest Department. Most of the Kani families did not want to be uprooted totally from the forest environments and resettled in Pattankulichapara or even Anchumaruthumoodu nearer the main road close to non-tribal people. Obviously the news of the forced uprooting from their hamlets where most of them had settled more than 40 years ago was mentally and spiritually traumatizing.

The authorities obviously were not in a position to provide land or shelter as promised to the people and did not do much before the sluices were plugged and waters began to rise. Meanwhile it was widely known that land will be allotted to the displaced Kanis in Podiyakkala which is around 3 km. east of Anchumaruthumoodu which is 5 km. from Vithura on the bus route to Peppara dam site. Two enterprising families who had close links to the forest officials shifted first to Podiyakkala before the waters rose. They cleared forests and started cultivating paddy, tapioca, banana etc. and built reed huts. A few families who put up strong resistance were given the option to stay back in the partly submerged village of Chemmankala further upstream. The rest of them shifted in stages. At least two women spoke of coming to the new hamlet in their bamboo raft when the waters started rising and a large reservoir formed all around their village. The government obviously got away by simply paying some minimal money compensation to a few of the affected families and conveniently forgot about all the tall promises given earlier and constitutional responsibilities to the socially weaker tribal people.

The PHED allotted the compensation package to the displaced people only in 1985-86, more than two years after the Kanis had themselves settled in Podiyakkala, Chemmankala and Chathancode. Only Podiyakkala was considered as eligible to be the Project Affected People's (PAP) resettlement colony. They were promised around 2.5 acres of land and up to Rs.12,000/- as compensation by the PHED for houses and crops lost. The PHED was supposed to acquire 110 ha. of land from the Forest Department, but acquired only about 50 ha. The Forest Department had meanwhile declared the whole

catchment area of the Peppara dam as a Wildlife Sanctuary and had started demarcating its boundaries. This was the final blow to the hopes of Kanikkar for just compensation and resettlement. The 60 families who are residing in Podiyakkala right now have anything between 10-20 cents to two acres of land. Most of them have around 50 cents to one acre of land only. In addition to the asbestos roofed small houses built by the PHED, 6 more houses were built by the Kanis themselves with help from the Vithura Panchayat. All the rest of the houses are made of mud and reeds with reed leaf thatch.

The Kanikkar do not prefer concrete houses. They are actually content in their beautifully built reed huts which they say are “*air conditioned, cool during day, warm during night and healthy for us*”. They are only aggrieved when promises are made by the authorities and not kept. They feel humiliated when poor quality houses are built for them which crumble down soon after. There are at least three houses in total disrepair in Podiyakkala and in spite of repeated complaints, no repair work has been done.

Some of the shrewd and intelligent Kanis know very well that all external help is destroying their true capabilities, self-reliance and their self-sufficient economy. They are able to laugh at themselves and dispassionately analyze their present plight. A few youngsters have even built a ‘machan’ like reed hut with reed mats and simple conveniences for renting out to known people from the city who come in search of peace and the luxury of a simple and organic living close to the wilderness.

They recollect in detail the injustice and corruption involved in getting loans and grants for house construction, allotment of wells, toilets and many developmental projects which they are entitled to get. But they know that they should not lose their culture or skills or their survival knowledge. At least some of the youngsters (like Mallan, Mathan, Sheela, Santha) know that it is this knowledge and skill, their ecologically viable life strategies and worldview that would sustain them and that would be in demand in the coming times of socio-economic and ecological collapse.

To understand fully the plight of the affected population, intensive fieldwork was conducted in all the three hamlets where the displaced Kanikkar had settled – Podiyakkala, Chemmankala and Chathancode. The population of these three hamlets – of severely dispossessed, disturbed to relatively less disturbed – have been affected variously by the construction of the dam and the follow up actions. Only two families in the old Chathancode settlement are dam displaced, and there are at least 4 families in Podiyakkala who are not uprooted people but who got land in Podiyakkala from relatives who were PAPs. The two families who had originally cleared forests and settled themselves in Chemmankala have expanded to nine families and a few more have moved in by marrying into the original oustee families.

This framework of detailed conversations both individual and family, group as well as collective discussions with all the displaced and dam affected people helped in understanding the complex dynamics of displacement and resettlement. I have tried to understand their rationale for the selection of their future habitat, their reaction to the construction of the dam, what they lost and what was given as compensation, their

survival strategies, their social interactions in the new environment, their opinion regarding the government rehabilitation and tribal development measures, their method of social and economic reconstruction and their perceptions of future options.

On the issue of selecting the land for settling down, it was understood that the tribal families from one settlement usually wanted to go en bloc to a particular locality if cultivable land and water were available there for all of them. The other important factor they needed was the availability of forest resources for fuel, small timber, non-timber forest products not only for personal use but also for selling in difficult times. In the case of the Kanikkar of Peppara, it was the community elders, the more conservative old people with their close knit large families and those with a stronger ethnic identity and pride in it, and independence who have been rendered poorest in every way through displacement. But in spite of these tragedies and injustice, it is these very same people who have, at least till now, retained their fortitude and hope in life along with their sense of values and self-respect. They call that indefinable quality of theirs as 'sathyam' (truth), which they believe forests have and they who live in the forests also have within them.

In the initial years of resettlement the oustees had to undergo a lot of hardships but there were some variations in the experiences according to the locality and the families' resource position. People had to face maximum hardships and starvation in the late 1970s and early 1980s when there were massive clear-felling of natural forests all over the Thiruvananthapuram Forest Division including in the submergible part of Peppara dam and even in the extensive tracts of the catchment of the reservoir, and conversion to monoculture plantations of eucalyptus, albizzia, acacia etc. Tragically the only employment available for them at that time was in the forest coups felling trees, loading them on to lorries, raising plantations, applying synthetic fertilizers and chemical pesticides, weeding etc. Many elders remember a controversy over applying lethal pesticides and fungicides in the eucalyptus plantations being raised in the catchment of the drinking water reservoir - Peppara. It became a big issue when the Kanis who were made to carry the pesticide sacks by head load to the plantations were poisoned and had to be hospitalized. Environmental activists took it up and the plantation raising was temporarily stopped. But the natural forests had already been destroyed.

All the respondents spoke of the poor quality of land they received and the threat of wildlife depredation which is very high in Podiyakkala. They criticized the underpayment by the government and the callous attitude to the project affected people. And they are sad that all of them have become irrevocably dependent on the government and the Forest Department and have not been able to collectively raise themselves up from cultural and economic collapse.

The oustees unequivocally felt that they were not properly compensated for their agricultural land and trees. None of them are in a position to have the same quality of life in the new locality as they had earlier. Most of them were not able to utilize the compensation money in a productive way. Some of them were cheated or looted and some lost it for unforeseen expenses like medication, marriage etc. Overall there was a general economic decline.

They underwent tremendous trauma and psychological scarring and some of them virtually went insane or deteriorated mentally and physically rapidly. We heard of two suicides, several broken families and marriage to non-tribals by both men and women. The displacement and consequent breaking down of the community structure obviously affected familial and inter-personal relationships. They are unhappy that they alone were forced to give up so much for the benefit of the city folk. They feel stigmatized as 'dam oustees' forever. The resettlement plan had no rehabilitation component in it and the planners and policy makers never had any interactions with the affected people and they seemed to have little knowledge about tribal life.

Even after twenty years since displacement, the Kanikkar still dream of their good old days and would not hesitate to go back if some miracle happens and their old lands become accessible again. Overall, it can be safely stated that these hapless people have not been able to reconstruct their past social edifice or material well being.

The government which wanted to solve the drinking water problem of the city naturally had good intentions, but the social and ecological costs were never attended to. It is a horrendous crime when millions of people are rendered homeless and become 'development refugees' – the so-called internally displaced people by large projects all over India. The authorities claim that they can rehabilitate the oustees for a much better way of life. Many officials simplistically believe that "any change from the miserable and poor life that the tribals lead in forest areas would be a blessing for them". But what the government forgets is that for an agrarian or natural resource based people, cultivable land and life support ecosystems are vital essentials. More over these people who need so little and who have lived in socially and ecologically viable subsistence economies are spiritually and emotionally attached to their ancestral land and ecosystems. But the developmental projects meant to bring economic prosperity destroy the land, shelter, livelihoods, resources and all future options for survival of large sections of the very same population the projects are supposed to benefit. This is simply violation of human rights guaranteed in the Constitution.

### **Reasons for Protest**

Social protests against large dams usually highlight the issue of displacement. These movements often take up the issue of what is perceived to be a 'fair' compensation by the State. Though these movements are often led by landed oustees, who are actually the only ones included in the governmental resettlement package, they are increasingly highlighting the far worse plight of the other sections of the displaced society, e.g., landless people, forest tribals and agricultural labourers (Singh, 1997).

The tribal communities often form a large proportion of the oustees. They do not have a highly stratified social structure. Land as well as other assets, like common natural resources and even cattle, goats etc. would be more or less equally owned. The anti-dam movements thus are forced to form a very broad platform of affected people which includes the artisans, landless peasants directly dependent on the land and natural

resources to be submerged apart from the landed people. The anti-dam movement has also to voice concerns for benchmark ecosystems, need for unmodified 'wild rivers' etc. While the immediate threat to the oustees is one of loss of land and livelihood and thus survival, many social and environmental activists use the social resistance to large dams to question the statist path of development and under-development (Singh, 1997). These groups also highlight the need for more sustainable and socially just uses of natural and productive resources. These voices of sanity often get branded as 'anti-development'. Yet they are emerging as a powerful challenge to the unequal and unsustainable development model we are following. Ultimately the social corrective responses are directed towards the establishment of an egalitarian and ecologically sustainable and livable world.

Of late, there is a growing debate on what comprises an ideal resettlement package. Various studies have shown that cash compensation for land and livelihood lost is the most unjust method of tackling the problem of dam displacement. It has also maximum possibility for corruption. Hard cash when it is given to tribals or other rural people are often wasted or is siphoned off by crafty outsiders. Compensation given for land is always much below the actual market value and they can never buy comparable extent of land or build houses with the money given. In the absence of a supporting steady livelihood, the cash compensation at best remains a source of subsistence for a short while. It is thus argued that land should be offered as compensation for land lost. But recent experience of land given for land lost as compensation has not been very heartening.

As good land is limited and perhaps the most sought after resource in India, the only land now offered to the oustees as compensation is of a very inferior, if not of an unproductive quality. It may in any case be currently in use by the host population at least as common land. Given the state of database on land resources in India and our reluctance in implementing Land Reforms, the exercise in finding adequate suitable lands for the oustees is increasingly becoming a futile one. Giving livelihood or employment as compensation also results in several problems. The dislocated people with generations of experience and expertise in agriculture or natural resource based livelihoods are not able to adapt to a new livelihood. Thus this process which can only be a long-term one, would be successful only in areas with a high level of education and developed human skills and suitable resources. In the case of the displaced Kanikkar of Peppara, one could see that none of them succeeded in getting even the post of a Tribal Forest Guard although at least 300 posts were advertised in the Kerala Forest Department recently. Actually none of them at Podiyakkala had even heard about this job opportunity.

The resettlement package provided has also been criticized by many for neglecting gender issues. The male members of the household are provided compensation but nowhere do the women enter official records as recipients. Legally the government is perhaps doing what is possible. But what the authorities fail to understand is that even though women do not have legal rights according to our laws, they do have their customary user-rights on the environment and the whole family's survival is usually dependent upon the women's knowledge and skills to use natural resources. Displacement which is often followed by dispersal leads to a breakdown of the family

and extinction of customary rights. This goes against the interests of women, especially the single, widowed, old or abandoned women.

### **Anti-dam / Anti Development Stance?**

Given this disheartening reality, and the intractable complexity of social issues involved in dislocation, activists campaigning for a proper resettlement and rehabilitation are forced to take up an anti-dam stance almost as a *fait accompli*. This was in the case of the Sardar Sarovar Project, Koel-Karo, Indravati, Auranga and such projects where very large tribal populations are being displaced. Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) of uprooted people are proven to be impossible tasks and do not appear in any cost-benefit analysis. It is a very costly and time-consuming affair, even if the political will is available and detailed plans are ready. If such R&R are fully carried out, it would make all the development projects, especially the large river valley projects economically unviable. In actuality all the large dams in India, more so in Kerala, are economically loss-making development measures. The State authorities usually get away with meager or no resettlement of oustees who are mostly either totally ecosystem dependent people or people not linked to the mainstream economy, or unorganized marginal farmers or landless labourers. One can see the difference in the rehabilitation package, the so called golden hand shake offered to workers in public sector units being privatized or shut down, and how the trade unions and the organized political forces champion their cause. The same sympathy and solidarity are not offered to the unorganized and non-capital-owning project oustees by the organized political system (Singh, 1997).

Social protest against displacement is not a new phenomenon. One of the first recorded protests against dam displacement occurred in the 1930s, during the construction of the Tata-Mulsi dam in the Western Ghats (Singh, 1997). In comparison with many other developing countries, the Government of India actually has had enough experience in resettling people, displaced forcibly or otherwise. The establishment of canal colonies in colonial Punjab (Ali, 1988) and the resettlement of partition refugees at the time of Independence or the Tibetan refugees, Burmese and Sri Lankan repatriates are the better-known examples. Farmer (1947) points out that expansion of agricultural area through the establishment of new colonies was the norm in India till the Third Five Year Plan. The Dandakaranya Project and in Kerala, the Wayanad Colonisation Programme are examples. The advent of the new agricultural policy emphasizing the green revolution model, resulted in a shift to large dams, mechanized and intensive agriculture, all leading to marginalizing the real farmer and damaging the agro-ecological foundations of the intensively farmed areas of our country. With the advent of the Green Revolution, the emphasis on settling people faded and the focus shifted to industrialization, economic progress and employment generation. The people who led ecologically viable and socially just lives and who preserved the country's age-old wisdom of prudence, equity and harmony in their lives all became dispensable.

The last two decades in India however saw the emergence of several social and environmental movements against almost all large developmental projects, whether mining projects, large dams, nuclear power plants, military bases, or super highways. It is

now an accepted fact that the rehabilitation of development oustees is one of the least satisfactory aspects of all these projects, especially reservoir projects (Cernea, 1988). In the case of mega dams like the Sardar Sarovar Project which causes displacement to the tune of one million people directly and indirectly, it becomes virtually impossible to organize resettlement sites for all the affected people.

Scudder (1986), an anthropologist who has studied dam-induced forced relocation in India does not mince words when he states that “next to killing a man, the worst you can do is to displace him”. This is most true when it comes to people whose lives are directly linked to nature. These people when uprooted from their natural habitat or when their natural resources are destroyed suffer total cultural and spiritual collapse. As cultural and biological diversity are closely inter-related the destruction of ecosystems often lead to a form of cultural genocide. What is even more surprising is that this is taking place and is actually accelerating without any serious debate on a proper resettlement policy for the country. Similar to the agricultural revolution in England during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which created a pool of cheap labor for later industrialization, the number of those displaced by the green revolution and other developmental projects in post-independent India is indeed large enough to constitute an uprooted class that provides a cheap labor force for capitalistic industrial development (Singh, 1997).

In the case of most of the mega dam projects in India, studies show that even the meager resettlement plan of the government is not implemented satisfactorily by the concerned agencies or the government. There are more than enough evidences for the widespread corruption and inordinate delay in the payment of compensation. In nearly all the cases, land was acquired at market price around the time the project was cleared. But compensation is given to them at the time of land acquisition which may be after a decade or more by which time the market rate would have increased considerably, literally ruling out land purchase by the oustees with the compensation they got (Thukral, 1988). The following Table (Table: 8) points to peoples’ expectations of market compensation in comparison to that provided by the State in the case of the Srisailam Project. The oustees’ expectation of land cost is more than 550% of that offered by the government, while for houses it is about 300% of that on offer (FFCSP, 1986).

**Table 10**  
**Private Expectations for Compensation and Public Payment (Srisailam)**  
**(in Rupees)**

	Villagers’ Expectation	Government Payment
Dry Land (per acre)	5,000	932
Wet Land (per acre)	13,800	2,332
Stone House	11,564	5,561
Mud Hut	2,500	645

Source: FFCSP, 1986 p.258

To get an idea of the amount being spent on compensation, it will help us if we contrast this with an expense estimate by the project authorities to temporarily house their construction employees. To cite a case from the SSP, ironically, the cost of temporary

accommodation for the staff overseeing the dam construction at the Kevadia colony, numbering a few thousand was more than the amount of compensation allocated for the resettlement of some 1,00,000 persons from the reservoir of the dam (Kothari & Bhartari, 1984). A study conducted by the Centre for Science & Environment (CSE) states that only as little as one percent of the total cost of dam projects in India has gone towards resettling the displaced (CSE, 1985). These figures give us an adequate idea about the kind of compensation offered to project affected people in India.

In such an abysmal state of affairs, it would not be an exaggeration to note that in many cases the oustees have simply been ignored and left to fend for themselves. Not only in the case of the Peppara dam, but also with regards to the Karappuzha Irrigation Project in the Wayanad district, Idukki Hydel Project in the Idukki district, Poringalkuthu and Sholayar Hydel dams in the Thrissur district and Idamalayar dam in the Ernakulam District in Kerala, hundreds of families, mostly tribal have been displaced without any compensation or resettlement programs. A report prepared by CSE (1985) points out that only 12,000 of the 36,000 household displaced by the Bhakra Nangal Project, 3,500 of the 18,500 oustee families of the Ukai Project and only 9,000 out of the 33,000 oustee families of the Pong Project have been even nominally resettled. But none of them are properly rehabilitated. On the basis of these three examples, it can be said that on an average only about 26.51 per cent of the oustees of large dams are resettled in India.

The amount of compensation given to the oustees is often arbitrary and often involves recourse to lawyers and middlemen which only richer families can afford as documented in the case of Srisailam (Shiva, et.al., 1991), and Ukai (Karve & Nimbkar, 1969). Viegas (1992) and Mankodi (1992) point to glaring instances of inadequate and arbitrary compensation in the case of Hirakud dam in Orissa and Ukai in Gujarat. Data collected by Murickan et.al., (2003) on development induced displacement in Kerala show that the rate of compensation awarded for the land acquired is approximately one third of its real value. This they say is somewhat positive compared to other States. But in this process, there is the possibility of high-level corruption creeping in. In practice, it is left to the discretion of the officer in charge to make the assessment and the oustees have to 'negotiate' with the authorities to get their land declared as paddy fields, productive homesteads, dry land etc. They conclude that "the mere fact of absence of reliable data regarding the number and type of people affected and displaced by the projects, even in the offices concerned, proves the lack of human consideration for these victims of development". The oustees also have to pay a considerable amount of money as bribes to the government officials to fix what is considered a fair compensation by the government and to expedite the inadequate payments they are entitled to (Thukral, 1988).

Rarely are productive assets, such as fruit trees, fully or properly valued, nor is the economic support from externalities such as the local commons, taken into account. There is also a gender bias in the form of compensation. While common lands, all natural resources and subsistence land are often worked, owned and even inherited by women in many areas, compensation is provided to the head of the family, or to the men. A uniform state-regulated patriarchy is thus forced upon cultures very different from the conceptual Indian. Compensation to oustees is limited to individual landholders who have land titles.

In tribal households and joint households, there would be no land titles and even if the land is registered in one person's name, they are farmed and used on the basis of all the households. Such a policy provides the Indian State with the opportunity to minimize its expenses on compensation (Joshi, 1987).

In most instances of displacement, the oustees do not receive land as compensation for land lost. Even when the oustees get some land, it comes with many attached problems. For example, it may have to be cleared and prepared for agriculture, as in the case of the Kanis of Peppara. This is a laborious and time-consuming process. The land may be of an inferior quality, or it may be under the de facto control of powerful vested interests. Often it has so happened that the land given would be an already allotted area for some other development-affected people who might have temporarily abandoned it because of its low quality, lack of water, inaccessibility etc. Social activists are concerned that tribals who are cultivating forestlands for generations without a legal document of ownership, or who are dependent upon 'wastelands' are not entitled to any compensation. Rights to such lands are not recognized by the Indian State after it nationalized the forests, even though the occupation and cultivation of such lands predated their declaration as Reserved Forests (Singh, 1998).

The use of force, in case of resistance, is often resorted to by the authorities in order to facilitate relocation, as in the case of the Sardar Sarovar Project. Basic human rights are not respected; women are raped, even children, old and infirm are beaten up (Bhatia, 1997). Displacement and relocation are often seen as law and order problems, with the oustees being on the wrong side of the law. The State and pro-dam supporters of late have even launched an offensive against the anti-dam activists, as documented in detail (Mukta, 1990; NGNS, 1990; Smita, 1993; Dharmadhikari, 1993).

In several cases, the authorities resort to destroying natural resources like forests, water sources etc. and even prematurely plug the dam, so that the people are forced to move out even before any resettlement sites are identified. No effort is usually made to recreate the village as it was at the old site. Neither is any effort made to minimize the loss of essential components social, cultural and spiritual value. What the oustees are provided is an atomized housing facility which quite often breaks their community systems, even their marital links and economic systems (Joshi, 1987). Viegas (1992) documents that a number of oustees of the Hirakud Project went on to resettle themselves, on being unhappy with the sites allotted by the government. In the case of the Pong Dam, the problems of the oustees were multiplied on facing a hostile population in the resettlement sites (Bhanot & Singh, 1992).

Cash compensation is paid in a lump sum to the oustees without any advice on proper investment or help in canalizing it towards a new livelihood. Agriculturists who have learnt only to depend on the existing natural resources or crops for their sustenance are left without skills to subsist in the new environs. Studies conducted on Sriram Sagar oustees on how they utilized the cash compensation, point that as little as 4 per cent of the oustees bought land, 20 per cent built houses, 26 per cent repaid their old debts and 50 per cent spent it on domestic needs (Shiva et. al., 1991).

Official resettlement in India has been restricted to a short period of time during which the actual physical movement of the oustees takes place. It is not attached to any long-term policy directed at providing economic opportunities to them. It is handled as swiftly and as cheaply as possible. The resettlement package is uniform, inflexible and with no possibility of modification if context demands. It is a haphazard process, dealt with in an ad hoc manner, and given a low priority in the overall project design. There is absolutely no involvement of the oustees in helping design their own resettlement package.

The pro-dam people and the government do not want to offer a proper resettlement package to the oustees as it is seen as a very expensive undertaking. The social and environmental movements may be able to get some concessions after a protracted struggle, but these remain only concessions, and cannot be regarded as proper rehabilitation measures. Similarly the ecological and anti-dam movements may be successful in drawing attention to the preservation of the ecosystem, but the vested interests are hardly likely to respect it (Singh, 1997). Even when the State concedes defeat at the face of stiff opposition, they may shift the dam site to some other site in the basin, or return to the same site after the movement peters down. There is a strong pro-dam lobby building up in the country consisting of rich farmers, industrialists, along with politicians, contractors, engineers and bureaucracy (Singh, 1987). Clearly a protracted struggle on the issue of the use of water is on the agenda in the years to come.

There are a number of studies available, highlighting the plight of the oustees. Some of these studies pointedly argue that we have no right to disturb the tribal culture and life strategies and destroy their survival base. The critics of this point of view state that such a stance can be problematical as it is seen to suggest that while having accepted 'modernity' ourselves we are trying to keep the tribals bound to 'tradition'. But the point that is missed in this debate is that the tribals and other socially and economically weaker sections of the society are victims of the present developmental process. The developmental process, contrary to helping these deprived people actually takes away whatever little is left with them. There is absolutely no talk about 'development oriented resettlement' from the authorities or any concerted effort on their part to make the displaced people the first beneficiaries of these projects (Singh, 1997). They are brutally uprooted and left to cope up with the misery of impoverisation. The problems of starvation, alcoholism, debt, followed by anomie and destitution which are the result of uprooting from the familiar surroundings continue (Mankodi, 1992; Shiva et. al., 1991).

It is when we move from the boardrooms of planning and negotiations to the actual implementation of the resettlement programme that the grim reality unfolds. A study of about 4,500 - 6,000 families conducted in May-June, 1997 in Gujarat by Bela Bhatia has documented the rehabilitation process and has provided a damaging critique to the government's claims that the rehabilitation package for the SSP has been a success. Bhatia points out that the government authorities have been utterly callous and have violated the guidelines set by the World Bank on resettlement, and have even acted in contempt of the judicial courts while displacing people (Bhatia, 1997). If this is the story of resettlement in the SSP, which has acquired the status of an international project, one

can imagine the terrible plight of the oustees of other projects. It would thus be safe to argue that displacement caused by large dams has resulted in total destruction of resources or total transfer of resources from the weaker sections of the society to the more privileged.

Today when we hear the stories of the oustees of the development projects like dams from several sources, we strongly feel that such processes should not be repeated elsewhere in the country whereby thousands of families are displaced from their native lands and are left to wander around in uncertainty. The government claims that it can rehabilitate the oustees for a much better way of life; but it forgets that for an agrarian population, readily cultivable land in suitable quantity as well as other related sources of livelihood are bare essentials which are not easily available in our country. Moreover the peasants and tribals are emotionally so highly attached to their ancestral land and certain specific cultural and spiritual bonds with their land that it is impossible to compensate for their loss or satisfactorily rehabilitate them.

Over and above all this is the never-ending debate on the 'preservation' of Adivasi culture, versus their 'assimilation' into the modern mainstream. There are many sociologists and economists who claim that opponents of the projects involving displacement of tribals from their milieu invoke the myth of a pristine tribal culture. The dam opponents are pictured as demanding that all 'Adivasis' ought to be preserved. And the advocates of development assert that this would deprive 'impoverished' and 'exploited' Adivasis of the fruits of development. Proponents of the dams argue that since tribal culture must ultimately bow to the superior might of the forces of modernization, displacement will not be an unmitigated trauma for Adivasis, but will merely hasten the inevitable process of assimilation (Joshi, 1991). Baviskar (1995; 1997) through her detailed and intimate studies of the Bhilala tribes of the Narmada valley however is of the opinion that the threat to Adivasi culture and survival due to displacement cannot be understood merely in terms of 'preservation' and 'assimilation'. According to her the public policy debate tends to be highly paternalistic, merely treating Adivasis as subjects of the State and not as actors in their own right.

The manner in which State policies are made and implemented further marginalizes and alienates the already impoverished and oppressed Adivasis. Under these circumstances the movement of the Bhilala Adivasis against the Sardar Sarovar Project, together with political mobilization on other aspects of development endeavours to widen the choices available to these people. This will go a long way in democratizing the process of decision making and taking it out of the hands of planners, politicians and the local elite. In the case of the Kanis who also have a history of struggle for justice, there is a socio-cultural and political process evolving to change policies that seek to define their universe and their future. By trying to forge meaningful choices that go beyond 'preservation' and 'assimilation', this process should naturally move towards social and economic empowerment on their own terms. What has to evolve from the various struggles of development affected people in India is a cultural identity that is distinctively ecological in nature incorporating tribal values and relations with land, forests and rivers (Baviskar, 1995; 1997).

Large dams do little to alleviate the existing social inequities; on the contrary they further aggravate the already skewed social structure in favour of the socially, economically and politically powerful, thus throwing to the winds the socialist pretensions laid down in the Constitution. The anti-dam movements thus become a challenge to the statist development path. The victims of development are fighting for survival by questioning the very nature of economic production and resource use. Through this challenge they are also helping in creating an alternative that is socially just and ecologically sustainable (Singh, 1997). And beyond alternatives, there is still the actual search for the real path for humans, as conscious living beings, for the survival of all life on earth, for all time to come.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **BEYOND COMPENSATION, RESETTLEMENT AND REHABILITATION**

The search for literature regarding resettlement and rehabilitation policies and their implementation worldwide brought out clearly their gross inadequacy. Even in the very best of instances of implementation, what has been done is of a very superficial nature. Beyond cash, land or infrastructural compensation, the long-term gentle nursing and the intelligent guidance from outside, an uprooted community needs to regain their vitality is never even comprehended by governments or developmental agencies. Particularly in the case of a forest tribal community, this guidance has to be very carefully modulated. Human needs are so complex and subtle, especially the vital intricate balancing adjustments between the people within a community, the violent uprooting ruptures all these relationships. The relationships between the communities and their habitat are so intricate and adapted over such a long span of time, it can never be replaced by any external intervention. So rehabilitation policies need to consider the characteristics of the community and its habitat in each instance and formulate policies with long time schedules for implementation.

In the case of Kerala and perhaps for the whole country, especially with regard to forest tribal communities, a possible partial answer for the past cases of neglected rehabilitation of developmental oustees is still possible through the Joint Forest Management Programme (JFM). This is currently being implemented as a National Policy bringing in the tribal communities and the forest fringe inhabitants directly into partnership with the Forest Department for forest resource management.

In the National Parks and Sanctuaries (Protected Areas) the social institution being recreated for sustainable resource management is called the Eco Development Committee (EDC). In the Reserved Forests outside the Protected Areas this body is called the Vana Samrakshana Samithi (VSS). This incipient programme could possibly provide the solution by bringing together the people and the officials and work out practical solutions through discussions to redress grievances of the past injustices. Hence we looked into in detail the functioning of the EDC set up in the rehabilitated village, Podiyakkala. The next two chapters deal with this aspect of the study.

#### **Displacement and Rehabilitation**

The United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Right to Development states that “the right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized” (As quoted in Seth, 2002). According to this Declaration, displacement by developmental measures is a human rights issue (Seth, 2002). Though it is done in the name of development and progress of the masses, it contrarily denies a large section of the masses the rights to development, livelihood, food and nutrition, clean and safe drinking water, work, education and residence at a place of

one's choice. As far as indigenous or tribal communities are concerned, it denies them their very way of life and shatters their social and ecological fabric forever. Development brings conflicts and competition within the body of the society by pitting one section of a population as the beneficiary of development against the other section who ends up bearing the cost.

Displacement is a complex phenomenon and hence needs a complex and multidimensional approach and understanding. Cernea (1996) was the first one to coin the term 'social disarticulation' to denote a situation whereby "life sustaining informal social networks of mutual help among people, local voluntary associations, self organized service arrangements etc. are dispersed and rendered inactive. This unraveling represents a massive loss of social capital incurred by the uprooted people, yet a loss that remains unquantified and uncompensated. Such 'elusive' disintegration processes undermine livelihoods in ways uncounted by planners". It means the disintegration of a community leading to dismantling production systems, kinship groups, family units, local labor and natural resource markets and cultural identities. Cernea (1996) outlines eight impoverishment risks for the displaced people. These are landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalisation, increased morbidity rate, food insecurity, loss of access to common property and social disintegration. All these problems are evident among the dam displaced Kanikkar of Peppara.

The three fundamental concepts used in the formulation of the theoretical model are risk, poverty or impoverishment and reconstruction. The concept of poverty is discussed here as situations in which people's welfare and livelihood worsen as a result of a specific intervention. Development programmes are not supposed to induce poverty or impoverishment. Yet under most circumstances such impoverishment processes do occur conflicting with the very essence and stated goals of development programmes. This is why preventing impoverishment must be regarded as the central issue in development induced population displacements and relocations (Cernea, 1997; 1998).

According to Cernea (1998), his conceptual representation of impoverishment through displacement is not just a model of inescapable gloom. It also contains in itself the model for the socio-economic reconstruction of those displaced. He describes precisely what kind of positive actions must be initiated to restore the livelihood and income of those displaced and, whenever possible, to improve them. Stood on its head, the risk model becomes a reconstruction model.

In my analysis of the results of the detailed interactions with the displaced Kanis, all the risks of impoverishments outlined by Cernea (1997; 1998) are carefully considered. In addition to these risks, the perceptions of the oustees regarding the trauma of displacement, their right to information, criteria of eligibility regarding resettlement plan etc. were taken into consideration. The role of other developmental agencies, threat of secondary displacement, changes in cultural and social matrix, impact on women, impact on community elders, impact on children are all analyzed.

## **Need for a Comprehensive Approach to the Displacement Issue**

Large dams cannot be examined outside social and political processes. It is unfortunate that irrigation, power generation and drinking water supply, which could play an important role in the alleviation of poverty and promote greater social justice, are in fact doing just the opposite. The privileged upper class, both rural landed big farmers and the urban wealthy, because of the power they enjoy and the vote banks they control, are successful in diverting nearly all the benefits of large river valley projects to themselves. Even a casual examination of the continuing horror story of displacement and development-induced impoverishment of large sections of rural and tribal people will bring to light the social and environmental cost of development.

Singh (1997) is of the opinion that “the extraction of surplus, crucial for capital accumulation among the Indian ruling class and its global partners, shown here as the purpose of development, is most starkly depicted in the process of displacement”. Displacement according to him is the process by which “the resources which had been the basis of the livelihood and sustenance of the uprooted communities come to be monopolized by the ruling class. The Indian society thus combines modern relations of production with the problems of an underdeveloped society. The ideology of development is used to strengthen inequitable social relations in society, through acts of displacement”.

Large sections of people thus become victims of development by being forcefully physically uprooted from their land, resources, culture and sustainable subsistence economies. The loss of their natural resources and sustenance forces them to depend on the government for doles and on the market economy for survival. Their entry into direct market relations, without the necessary capital, education, skills or the competitive mindsets, places them at a disadvantage from the very beginning. Displacement thus inevitably leads to their pauperization and increased marginalisation.

Undoing the mistakes of the past is necessary, but will not be easy. It will involve the development of different sorts of partnerships in the search for more sustainable solutions (Marsden, 1998). There was a time when it was believed by the policy makers that the obstacles to development are the forest dwellers who subvert the Forest Department's programmes, or the subsistence peasants who resist technological change. Many still believe that it is the impoverished people who, by directly depending on the natural resources for survival, destroy the ecological foundations of the country. But in actuality it is the indirect ecological footprints of modern, urban, consumeristic humans that are irrevocably destroying natural resources beyond its self-renewal capacity. The fruits of development are increasingly overshadowed by the environmental risks and latent lethal side effects. People now question the right of the government to determine what is and what is not in the 'public interest'. If sustainable solutions are to be developed, the resources of communities at the grass roots need to be combined with those of other institutions, government and non-government, private and public, to implement local integrated development strategies. Here all the people involved will have to recognize their social and ecological obligations, as well as rights to ensure sustainability, justice and harmony.

## **The Legal Frame**

As far as displacement of huge populations is concerned, the most destructive power the authorities have with them is the Land Acquisition Act (LAA) of 1894. The LAA 1894 is a very old central law but it has remained in operation for more than a whole century with few amendments. The latest amendments were made by the Parliament in 1984 and some amendments have been made by the State legislatures from time to time.

The Act claims to provide the Law for the acquisition of land needed for public purposes. Section 3 relating to definitions does not comprehensively define the expression, 'public purposes'. The 1984 amendment, however, lays down that public purposes include provision of village site, land for town and rural planning, planned development of land with public funds, land to Corporations controlled by the State, land for residential purposes for the poor or landless or to persons displaced or affected by any scheme undertaken by Government / Corporation / Local Authority, land for building public office etc.

The various steps of the land acquisition procedure, such as public notifications in newspapers and filing of objections, questioning 'public purpose' within 21 days, and declaration under section 6 and notice to persons under section 9 of the LAA (1894) seem to assume rather hypothetical dimensions. Do the common tribals or Scheduled Caste persons residing in a remote village have the wherewithal to enter the arena against the mighty State? Can they ever challenge a declaration of 'public purpose' and properly place the grounds for the infirmity of such a declaration or suitably bring up the factors determining the compensation before the prescribed authority? These poignant questions still remain valid even a century after the formulation of the LAA.

The very basis of the LAA (1894), its legal premises, its apparent incompatibility with our constitutional frame of Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy and Special Provisions for the Scheduled Castes / Tribes and weaker sections has been widely questioned. Further LAA's failure to provide any compensation excepting cash and its not being applicable to a large category of weaker people in the rural polity who obtain their livelihood from the land but who are not recognized as having any 'interest' in that land under the LAA (1894) has also been strongly criticized by the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (1990), Verma (1985), Fernandez and Thukral (1989), Singh (1989), Morse & Berger (1992), Roy Burman (1992), Dhagamwar (1989), Mahapatra (1991) and Baboo (1993) among many others.

The LAA (1894) is largely based on the English Land Acquisition Act. But in UK, unlike in India, the Laws of Compensation make liabilities fully justifiable in accordance with the actual value of the property to the individual (Singh, 1989). Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (1990) is of the opinion that during the British period, when the State started establishing its authority over the natural resources, the authority of the community which was prevalent till then was extinguished. The tradition

in our country to regard natural resources as 'means of livelihood and not property' was ignored and land was treated purely as property belonging to the individual or the State.

What has happened after Independence is that anything and everything could be labeled development. Therefore it has been possible to use LAA (1894) for almost all types of development programmes including tourist resorts! Dhagamvar (1989) points out that the 1984 amendment to LAA (1894) have made land acquisitions much easier. Now the public sector can directly acquire land and the private sector can do so through the government. Earlier they had to purchase land at market prices. Lands can even be acquired for residential colonies. Under LAA (1894), the only entitlement for the persons whose land is acquired is cash compensation. The determination of compensation is also not equitable particularly in respect to tribal and backward areas where land is not freely sold.

The Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (1990) puts it most poignantly, "When in pursuance of a lot of incongruous principles and in a depressed psychological frame, the entire land of a farmer which is 'life personified for him', so much so that he is prepared to die or kill even when a field-boundary is disturbed by someone, is snatched away under the shadow of the authority of the State, merely by throwing at him some rupee coins, numbering a hundred or two, he is hurt to the core, but cannot express his anguish. In a state of utter helplessness he may get deeply disturbed and prefer to end his life. But the powers that be do not see in this even a shadow of injustice anywhere around them, everything appears to be proper and equitable, when looked at with spectacles of formal justice and the transaction may even be considered to be in his interest".

Singh (1989) argues that Land Laws in India, in violation of Article 14 of the Constitution – equality before the Law – have generated two types of citizens. The first type are having the right to land as they are governed by the Tenancy Laws and the second category are those who do not get any title of land however long they may live on it or cultivate it, as they are governed by the Forest Laws. Further the Forest Laws infringe on another basic right of the forest dwellers, viz. right to life enshrined in Article 21. This dispensation discriminates the most against the tribals. Singh also refers to the Human Rights Convention, International Labour Convention 107, and the Convention of Aboriginal Rights to all of which India is a Signatory.

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has held that the right to life includes the Right to Livelihood, which is the means of livelihood. The Court reasoned that, "if the Right to Livelihood is not treated as a part of the Constitutional Right to Life, the easiest way of depriving a person of his right to life would be to deprive him of his means of livelihood to the point of abrogation (Sorabjee, 1995). It also includes inter alia, right to educational facilities, conditions of freedom and dignity and humane conditions of work, as also the right to free legal aid to poor and indigent persons also in the vital context of Project Affected Peoples (PAPs).

The tribals are, in many areas, regarded as encroachers on forest lands, and the government from time to time agrees as a kind of benevolent act to regularize their occupancy. (The Narmada Tribunal Award underwriting the intention of the Government of Gujarat to do so is a case in point). As Baxi (1989) points out, our Constitution “celebrates the Spirit of Swaraj meaning participatory governance... It is a Republican India where the Indian citizen stands endowed with rights and responsibilities for the development of the country. By development the Constitution means simply that process of governance which, while respecting human rights of all persons, secures to all Indians the freedom from material impoverishment. The planning process in India however betrays the spirit of the Indian Constitution... and in no area is this ‘singular’ inversion of the Constitution more acutely demonstrated than, perhaps, in the decisions concerning large, medium and small dams”.

Discussing the implementation of the process of land acquisition under LAA (1894), the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (1990) brings out how the objections of the people to the validity of ‘public purpose’ in respect of land to be acquired are disposed off by the authorities in a routine way. Moreover, the objections under this provision cannot be raised by the people in general or the community but only by those who have interest in the land and know how narrow the definition of ‘public purpose’ is (Sections 10 and 38, LAA (1894)). Many people would not have been served notices regarding the acquisition of their lands.

The displacements in the tribal areas throw up the questions discussed above in a particularly acute manner. These areas are characterized, inter-alia by being “outside the market system...”; “dependent on forests or in other words living in “semi isolation...”; “independent of national economic system...”; “their economic lifestyle largely dependent on the specific natural environment...” and “having loose tenure over their traditional lands...” (Morse & Berger, 1992).

### **The Search for a Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) Policy**

To date there is no National R&R Policy in India. Four States, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and West Bengal have developed a sector specific (coal) R&R Policy. And four other States (Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Gujarat) have issued Government Orders / Resolutions. The availability of the State or National Policies is not necessarily an indication that those States which have policies are any further forward in dealing more successfully with R&R issues. There is a need to ensure that the policies are implemented in conformity with Indian Law in as transparent and equitable a manner as possible. To do this there is need to obtain relevant and reliable baseline information, so that the extent of the problem to be addressed can be known, and where possible the extent of displacement minimized (Marsden, 1998).

Since there is no National R&R Policy in India, the World Bank’s emphasis has been on ensuring that particular projects in particular States are underpinned by robust R&R Policies which uphold the principles outlined in its operational directives. The attention of the NGO movements, particularly those concerned with tribal rights and

environmental issues, as well as that of some northern donors, has been drawn to the issues surrounding displacement because of increased interest in issues of sustainability and human rights. These focused in the early 1990s around the Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat, which at that time was supported by the World Bank. They still provide a focus for those who question the dominant development model, and the implications of the reform agenda that the Indian Government has pursued, with the Bank support, since the early 1990s. The Bank has expressed to the government the need for a National Policy. The Bank's ability to influence the evolving process is acknowledged by both NGOs, bilaterals and multilaterals, who use the Bank's Operational Directive as a template for their own approaches. But there is concern in some quarters that the government's efforts are largely driven by the need to satisfy the demands of the Bank rather than by any genuine desire to shift the balance of concern towards those involuntarily displaced. While there does appear to be a genuine understanding of the principles underpinning the Bank's Policy at the highest levels, translating this down through the bureaucracy is a very difficult task (Marsden, 1998).

A draft of a National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy is currently under discussion, and has been the subject of widespread consultations amongst State governments and within the NGO community in many parts of the country since 1995. A recent NGO publication provides a detailed overview of these policies as well as critiques of them and the instruments used for resettlement (Fernandes & Paranjpye, 1997).

Discussions on a National R&R Policy have been taking place since 1989. In 1989, a National Working Group on Displacement was formed through an NGO initiative. This also involved government officials. A draft of a National Policy on Resettlement of Project Affected Persons was prepared. Since then four national meetings have been convened between 1995 and 1996. Four drafts have been prepared encompassing an ever-widening group of people – from 'oustees of river valley projects', to 'persons affected by reservoir projects', and now to the 'rehabilitation of persons displaced as a consequence of acquisition of land'.

The NGO Alternative of the Current National Draft Policy for Rehabilitation has been submitted to the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment for its consideration. The current draft emphasizes equity, fairness, justice and equality in the distribution of burdens and benefits (GOI / MRD, 1995). The participants in the preparation of the alternative policy strongly feel that a Policy is inadequate and a Law is required. So after preparing the alternative to the draft policy, the participants in the debate decided to formulate a new Law on rehabilitation and change the LAA (1894), since it goes against the rights of the poor. The dominant opinion that emerged during the above mentioned national meetings was that rehabilitation should not be separated from land acquisition and that the LAA (1894) should be changed in such a manner as to minimize displacement and turn rehabilitation into an integral part of such acquisition.

The focus of the NGO alternative rehabilitation policy is the community, not individuals or even families. Women are expected to have a bigger say in this than in an individual-based system. It is also a method of rebuilding the social and cultural systems according

to the needs of the new environment. Unless efforts are made to ensure that displacement is minimized and that the Displaced Peoples (DPs) / Project Affected Persons (PAPs) are the first beneficiaries, the process of their impoverishment will continue even when GNP grows. The majority will thus get marginalized. This process has to be reversed. The Policy and Law of rehabilitation can give legal backing to such a change in favour of the marginalized. But Laws cannot be effective in themselves unless a social infrastructure is created for this purpose. The process the NGOs have gone through is meant to be a step in the direction of the victims of development getting involved in decision-making and reacquiring control over their livelihood that they have been deprived of in the name of national development and public purpose (Fernandes, 1998).

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ECO DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – POSSIBILITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

The exclusivity of Protected Areas (PAs), as envisaged in conventional forest conservation is not always possible in the Indian context. The population of humans in and around these Protected Areas is largely rural or tribal and directly dependent on the natural resources for sustenance. Most of the PAs in India experience human interference, and about 72 per cent of Wildlife Sanctuaries and 56 per cent of National Parks have human settlements within their boundaries. 73 per cent of Wildlife Sanctuaries and 39 per cent of National Parks experience grazing by domestic animals. About 8 per cent of National Parks and 26 per cent of Wildlife Sanctuaries have reported incidence of illegal occupation or illegal use or both (Kothari et. al., 1989).

The objectives of the management of the PAs in India till recently focused on plant and animal conservation and people were totally excluded. After the promulgation of the Wildlife Protection Act in 1972, the network of PAs was strengthened all over the country and restrictive access rules were strictly enforced by the State Forest Departments. Over the next three decades the Wildlife Management approach towards local communities was often confrontational. Protected Areas alone uprooted thousands of forest dwelling families who had been the original occupants of the forests. They were forced to become ‘illegal encroachers’, ‘poachers’ and ‘smugglers’ in their own ancestral lands. However it has been widely realized that natural resources cannot be protected without the participation of the local people whose survival is intimately linked with the forests. The latest National Forest Policy also aims at participatory forest protection and management measures. To this end, Eco Development Committees (EDCs) will be formed in the Protected Areas and ‘Vana Samrakshana Samithies’ (VSS) in the other Forest Divisions. A participatory management strategy of the PAs, the Eco Development Programme aims at “conserving the biodiversity by addressing both the impact of the local people on the PAs and impact of PAs on the local people”. The EDCs emerged around many PAs in Kerala in recent years through village level planning of reciprocal commitments. The reciprocity resides in (i) specific measurable actions by local people to improve conservation and (ii) project investments that foster alternative and sustainable resource use and livelihood.

The Peppara Sanctuary has 17 Kani tribal settlements inside the forests and a large population of people living around the Protected Area. Seven EDCs were formed in the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary. They are Podiyakkala, Anakkallu, Kunnathery, Chathancode, Podiyam, Cherumankal and Bonaccord. Of these, Anakkallu and Kunnathery do not function any more. Detailed Micro Plans have been prepared for the functioning of each of them during 1999-2000. Stakeholder analysis of the Forester, Forest Guard, daily wage watchers, residents and the Ward Member has been done.

The Micro Plan identifies the following difficulties faced by the Kanis living in the Sanctuary:

1. Wildlife depredation of crops. Wild boar, elephants and sambar deer cause considerable destruction of the crops of Kanis in all the settlements. Partly because of crop loss due to wildlife, the Kanis are now forced to shift from food crops to crops like rubber.
2. They do not have the right to cut trees.
3. They are not allowed to collect sand, rocks etc. for building houses.
4. They are restricted from fishing in the reservoir.

The socio-economic survey for the Micro Plan has also identified several related problems affecting the Kanis:

1) Acute unemployment; 2) Exploitation by outsiders; 3) Scarcity or contamination of drinking water; 4) Lack of medical facilities; 5) Lack of small scale industries (e.g., tailoring, livestock etc. providing income); 6) Lack of latrines; 7) Restriction to lop the branches of trees in the settlement for their agricultural operations.

The Eco Development Committee (EDC) being set up has both long-term and short-term objectives:

The long-term objectives are:

1. biodiversity conservation,
2. conflict resolution between the people of the settlement and the Forest Department, and between the people outside the settlement and within,
3. improvement of living standards of the members of the EDC.

The short-term objectives are :

1. to reduce fuel wood collection from the Sanctuary to one third of the present amount,
2. to prevent wildlife depredation,
3. to reduce dependence on the Sanctuary vegetation for small timber,
4. to reduce dependence on the Wildlife Sanctuary for thatch grass and reed leaves,
5. to reduce the dependence on the Sanctuary for fodder grass,
6. to reduce NTFP collection and install measures for proper extraction and treatment,
7. to enhance the living standards of the people and
8. to carry out awareness programmes and discussions among the people for conservation of forests and forest resources.

The envisaged programmes for fulfilling the above objectives are:

Objective – 1

- a. Increase fuel availability in the village
- b. Provide smokeless choolas, kerosene stoves etc. for fuel use efficiency
- c. Planting trees on bunds and along boundaries
- d. Planting inside forests and in hamlets

Objective – 2

- a. Prevent wildlife from straying into cultivated areas
- b. Give adequate compensation for wildlife damage
- c. Grow natural fences, belt of trees around settlements
- d. Erect electric fences to prevent ingress of wild animals into fields
- e. Dig trenches for the same
- f. Pay compensation for crop losses

Objectives – 3 & 4

- a. Bring down the consumption of small timber
- b. Plant small trees for timber
- c. Provide stronger permanent houses.
- d. Provide tin sheets for roofing
- e. Plant more trees

Objective – 5

- a. Decrease grazing in the forest
- b. Encourage stall feeding
- c. Plant fodder grass in the settlement

Objective – 6

- a. Plant non-timber forest species inside the forests and within the village lands
- b. Demarcate areas for NTFP collection and provide identity cards to people who engage in NTFP collection

Objective – 7

- a. Agricultural development
- b. Minor irrigation
- c. Financial help for medicinal plant garden
- d. Vegetable cultivation i.e., Kitchen garden
- e. Provide sewing machines
- f. Provide goats, fowl etc.
- g. Support cattle rearing

Regular medical camps and measures to avoid exploitation from outside are also envisaged. Smokeless choolas, where feasible electricity connections, provision shop, drinking water supply schemes etc. are to be provided as soon as possible. A priority list was drawn up and the following steps were decided to be taken immediately:

1. Reduce wildlife depredation
2. Reduce exploitation by outsiders
3. Give title deeds where possible
4. Provide loans
5. Improve travel facilities
6. Provide work training
7. Agriculture development

A Micro Plan for Rs.4,69,400/- was drawn up including a Central Government fund contribution of Rs.60,000/-. The duties of the Forest Department are spelt out as:

1. Implementation of Micro Plan
2. Provide technical help
3. Strict enforcement of Law against forest crimes
4. Provide employment for the villagers

The responsibilities of the villagers are stated as:

1. Prevent forest fires
2. Patrolling of forests at least twice a week
3. See that NTFP, fuel wood and thatch grass are collected according to the sanctioned Micro Plan
4. Avoid helping poachers
5. Co-operate with the Forest Department in implementing forestry schemes in the area
6. Start two bank accounts in the committee's name
7. Have a core fund for development
8. Avoid abetting forest crimes

### **The EDC of Podiyakkala – Perceptions of the People**

The Eco Development Programme of Podiyakkala settlement was started with much fan fare and in the initial stages high hopes were raised among the Kanis. As Bhagavathy, one of the matriarchs says, *“The high forest officials, the Wildlife Warden, DFO and others promised big things for our development. But in the end they did nothing for us. They said each family would be given Rs.2,500/- for agricultural development. But they just dumped a few hundred banana saplings on us. They said they would give fertilizers, but gave nothing. Only a few of us planted those bad quality saplings, the rest withered and became part of the soil”*. She has no trust in the forest officials whom she believes will only cheat them. But she does not trust her people either. *“We have also become selfish. Those who are close to the forest officials benefit. But they do not want the community to benefit”*.

Devaki and many other women believe that the forest officials have a negative and non-co-operative attitude to the Kanis. *“They look at us as though we are criminals. They do not take us into confidence. That is why the EDC failed”*.

Radha who was the first Bank Nominee in the EDC said, *“I resigned because I didn't want to take all the blame for repeated failures and mishaps from the side of both the Kanis and the forest officials. The EDC failed to gain the trust of the community. They have not understood the real objectives of the programme”*. However she knows fully well that *“Kanis, including myself are not on the right path. Actually only a few of us are criminals. But they are able to get into the good books of the officials and destroy everything”*.

The Moottukanis of the displaced hamlets had no high opinion about the Eco Development Programme. They viewed it as yet another unviable programme. According to them Kanis should remain self-reliant maintaining a self-sufficient economy of their own. But the majority of the Kanis interviewed believe that the programme can still be salvaged. They put the blame on some of the over enthusiastic forest officials who gave inflated promises which they did not keep. Moreover there was an unfortunate incident of the death of an elephant in the Sanctuary which was flashed in the newspapers. The elephant had died a gruesome death after drinking poisonous 'wash' kept in the illicit liquor-brewing den in the neighbouring areas like Kuttappara and Meenankal. There were some arguments between the Kanis (who were employed to cremate the carcass of the elephant) and the forest officials over wages. A young Kani man was reportedly beaten up by the officials. This led to ill feelings in the minds of all the Kanis in Podiyakkala and alienation from the programme. The forest officials misunderstood that the Kanis were responsible for reporting the news of the dead elephant to the media. They did not give temporary forest watcher jobs to the Kanis of Podiyakkala that fire season. A few of the aggrieved Kanis in vengeance set fire to the forests. Most of the Kanis, especially the women were sad about this incident and said this should not have happened.

Saikumar, the present President of the Podiyakkala EDC, and Mallan, President of Chathancode EDC talked to us in detail about their experiences in managing the Eco Development Programme. Sukumaran Kani, a senior man who had worked in the Forest Department as daily wage watcher for many years also had very clear notions about how and why the programme has not taken off in Peppara Sanctuary. They gave practical suggestions on how to strengthen the EDCs. These young community leaders along with many others feel that ecodevelopment is perhaps the only viable and practicable solution for the ecological, social and economic problems faced by the Kanikkar, especially those who are settled inside the Wildlife Sanctuaries. They are of the opinion that the Podiyakkala and Chathancode EDCs have not succeeded because of

1. tall promises that were given initially and not kept by the higher officials in the Forest Department;
2. lack of transparency regarding the programme and the actual funds available;
3. lack of understanding on the part of the officials of the real problems of the Kanis;
4. strict enforcement of Sanctuary Laws curtailing the NTFP collection rights of the Kanis without giving proper alternative employment or survival resources;
5. lack of awareness about the actual objectives of the programme;
6. a few unfortunate incidents which alienated the Kanis from the Forest Department and
7. denial of the traditional employment opportunities as forest watchers, eco-tourism guides etc.

The perceptions of the Kanikkar and the recommendations of the above mentioned young leaders how to rejuvenate and strengthen the EDCs for the conservation of forests and the survival of the Kanikkars are as follows:

1. The background, the philosophy and the aims and objectives of the Eco Development Programme should be explained to the Kanikkars and all other stakeholders including the forest officials, Social Activists, ST Promoters and Panchayat members. The misunderstanding that this is another government development programme for providing grants, loans or subsidies should be corrected. People should be made to understand their rights and their responsibilities in protecting their life support systems for their own future survival and for the survival of all others.
2. There should be a proper Micro Plan for the programme in each area which should be prepared with the full participation of the Kanikkar. They should be able to implement it on their own with minimum support from the Forest Department. This Micro Plan should have short-term as well as long-term perspective plans. Its ultimate goal should be economic as well as social rejuvenation of the human community and restoration of the forest ecosystem.
3. There should be regular meetings and open discussions in the EDCs with the full participation of all the people. These meetings should be for awareness creation, conflict resolution and training for the smooth functioning of the programme.
4. There should be transparency and consistency about the programme and its finances. Even if it is a small monetary grant, it should be presented and explained before everyone and expended in a just manner for the common good of the hamlet.
5. Many were of the opinion that instead of giving wage labor for a few, money should be spent on a common development in the area. For example, funds could be allotted for the two culverts to be built for the road to Podiyakkala from Anchumaruthumoodu to become jeepable. The work can be done by them voluntarily as 'Sramadan'.
6. The Forest Department should take steps to give clearance for the above road so that the Vithura Panchayat can go ahead with the necessary roadwork. The EDC could put up a check post at the entrance to the forest area and prevent the ingress of outsiders into the Sanctuary. This will be the easiest way for the forest officials to regain the confidence of the Kanis.
7. The Forest Department should earmark a certain area for the Kanis to collect the NTFP needed for their survival. The Kanikkar can be entrusted with the responsibility of protecting the core area of the Sanctuary from fire, exploitation etc.
8. All the Kanis believe that the degraded forests of Peppara should be rejuvenated and restored to evergreen forests. Protection from fire and lopping, planting with indigenous species, soil and water conservation measures all should be taken up in the degraded forests. Kanikkar can be given the responsibility of this task and

assured employment in a carefully planned eco-restoration programme.

9. Man-made forest fires are the biggest threat to the forests and should be prevented. Kanis should be entrusted with the duty to prevent fires throughout the year. They can be given uniforms, identity cards and badges and the authority to check people moving within forests. A few of the educated youngsters can be given training and provided with leaflets about the deleterious impact of forest fires to carry out a campaign among tourists, NTFP collectors and their own people.
10. Kanikkar should be given the job of tourist guides so that they can prevent littering, setting fire to forests, collection of rare plants etc. by the tourists. They should be able to impart to the visitors a culture of reverence to nature and the spirit of conservation.
11. Running of the canteen at Bonaccord which is the most lucrative work the Kanis are capable of undertaking, should be given in turns to all the EDCs in the Peppara Sanctuary. A neat profit of more than a lakh rupees can be made by running the canteen during the Agasthyarkoodam pilgrimage season. Unfortunately this lucrative work is now allotted only to the Bonaccord tea estate labourers' EDC.
12. Strong action against illicit liquor brewing in the forests should be enforced by the Forest Department. The Kanikkar can support the forest officials in this task.
13. Depredation of crops by wildlife should be checked. Kanis should be given compensation for crop loss through the EDC without the complicated bureaucratic procedures of the Forest Department.
14. EDCs should have the power to settle minor forest cases in the tribal settlement itself so that the Kanis are not forced to go through the time consuming and expensive legal procedures.
15. Innovative commercial activities including marketing value added hill products using honey, gooseberries, tamarind, garcinia, medicinal plants and the like can be planned to boost the economic status of the Kanis.
16. Wild indigenous trees of economic value apart from timber, like dammer, Cinnamomum, Myristica, Garcinia, mangoes etc. can be planted in and around the settlement or in degraded forest or plantation areas. Nurseries can be raised by the Kanikkar themselves and customary rights can be worked out for the just and equitable use of these produce.
17. Cultivation of indigenous varieties of food crops like hill paddy, tapioca and other tuber crops, dry cereals such as maize, pulses and vegetables can be encouraged and the produce brought to the organic markets expanding in the cities. Poultry and stall fed

cattle rearing also can be supported so that they will have food and manure as well as eggs and milk for sale. All this would provide nutrition, income and self-respect to the Kanikkar.

18. The existing SHGs in the settlements should be strengthened and the women should be encouraged to take part in all the above activities.
19. The functioning of the Forest Department should be changed from the present rigid bureaucratic set up to a more humane and flexible way of dealing with people.
20. A Forester should be responsible exclusively for the EDC. He should be relieved of regular forest working.

Discussions were held with the social worker and a few forest officials connected with the Sanctuary management. The former agreed with all that the Kanis stated. He said that with a bit of good will and co-operation from the Forest Department, the EDCs still could be salvaged for the benefit of the forests as well as the people. The forest officials I met were new to the area and the programme. They had little to say about the programme but gave me the five Micro Plans of the EDCs of Podiyakkala, Chathancode, Podiyam, Cherumankal and Bonaccord. The World Bank funded Kerala Forestry Project which supported the Eco Development Programme financially was over by December, 2003 and the Department is facing severe financial crunch. Obviously the EDCs in the PAs or the VSSs in other Forest Divisions are not in a position to stand on their own, and the authorities have not thought of any other sources of material help to continue one of the most people-oriented, ecologically viable programmes ever taken up by the Forest Department.

As Saikumar puts it, *“the Forest Department should change their notions of ecodevelopment in a tribal area. They need only assist us in the protection of the natural ecosystems in this area. They need not give employment to a few of us. They should gain the people’s confidence by offering to improve our lot. They can make us do anything by being kind and just to us. We will do fire watching and forest protection work voluntarily if they utilize the EDC money for our welfare”*.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WAY FORWARD

In tropical agrarian or tribal reaches in countries like India, conventional development has caused irreparable damage to the rich and diverse ecosystems and has impoverished the majority of the so-called ecosystem-people who have direct and intimate life-dependence on the natural resource systems. Often they have suffered forced displacements and loss of land and livelihood with little or no compensation, thus sharing more in the cost than receiving their share of the material gains and overall 'progress' flowing out of the 'development'. Sadly such inequitable distribution of benefits and losses has been accepted as inevitable in the process of development.

In such a situation, one finds local people's groups, environmental groups and social activists opposing and agitating against developmental programmes. There is a nascent, yet growing debate in the society about the very suitability of the type of development we are pursuing. There are also several attempts at studying the causes of impoverishment that come along with development programmes. A clear understanding of the whole process is an essential pre-requisite for mitigating the risks intrinsic in displacement.

The debate about the present model of development poses several questions:

- i. Is it justifiable to support developmental programmes which are badly planned, which are economically unviable, ecologically destructive and socially unjust?
- ii. How do we accept developmental programmes beneficial only to a section of the society and at the same time undercutting the meager livelihood resources of other groups of people and have severe long-term impoverishment consequences?
- iii. The question of generational justice involved in this kind of development that threatens the survival rights of future generations has to be considered.
- iv. The question of ecological justice which is involved in development programmes that undermine the very viability of ecosystems upon which life on earth itself depends need to be considered.

These are basic questions about social and ecological justice in development. Social justice and social injustice are not concepts frequently employed in the discourse on development, but there are many thinkers (Cernea, 1998; Fernandes, 1998; Baviskar, 1997; Marsden, 1998; Seth, 2002 et. al.) who marshal strong arguments for considering social justice, tribal rights and issues of sustainability and even viability of the development process in India. However the environmental and the complex ecological impacts of human endeavours have not been given due importance. There are attempts to make public hearings and Environment Impact Assessments (EIAs) mandatory before any sanction is given to mega projects. But our experiences show that the people, especially those who might be affected by the project, usually have no access to information and by the time they are alerted about the project, it is already too late and all

clearances have been given. EIAs are often commissioned by the project authorities themselves and public hearings are easily manipulated.

The study of the displaced Kani tribal people of the Peppara dam project bring to light the following major findings:

- Peppara dam on the Karamana River was commissioned in 1984 creating a reservoir of 5.82 sq. km. inundating and destroying the wet evergreen forests of incalculable value over this area and around its vicinity.
- The project resulted in the displacement of 43 families of Kanikkar residing in ten hamlets along the Karamana River.
- They were promised 2.5 acres of land of their choice and up to Rs.12,000/- as cash compensation for the house and crops they lost.
- The PHED was supposed to acquire 110 ha. of forest area from the Forest Department and create a model resettlement colony for the displaced people giving them land in exchange for the lands lost, housing, drinking water facility, and subsidies for economic and social rehabilitation.
- But two years after the displacement, the PHED managed to acquire 50 ha. of land in Podiyakkala and built 29 houses for them.
- Along with the construction of the dam, the whole catchment area of the reservoir was declared as the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary extending over an area of 53 sq. km.
- Once the area was opened up for the dam, a more extensive area of forests in and around Peppara was clear felled and converted to plantations of Eucalyptus, Albizzia and Acacia by the Kerala Forest Department and the Kerala Forest Development Corporation.
- The promise of land for land, houses with all conveniences, and all other developmental and rehabilitation measures offered to the Kanis were not fulfilled by the authorities.
- The displaced Kanikkar resettled themselves haphazardly in stages in Chemmankala, Chathancode and Podiyakkala. Podiyakkala where the houses were built and the maximum number of oustees ultimately settled was officially declared as the resettlement colony.
- Right now the displaced Kanis have only between 10-20 cents to 2 acres of land per family. Most of the houses built by the PHED are in bad disrepair; two houses have crumbled and are beyond repair.
- The displaced people have had to face several adverse social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts. These have affected their productive assets, their sources of livelihood, cultural identity, families and kinship, social relations, community structure, traditional authority and potential for mutual help that come out of these relations. Their traditional and ecologically viable agriculture was totally destroyed, thus affecting their food security and overall self-sufficiency.
- The Kanis of Peppara are an ethnic group who have homogeneous interests, potentials and cultural characteristics. Yet the resettlers have faced impoverishment risks in different ways. Certain families are definitely affected

- more adversely than others. For instance, large families, women, and elders who resisted displacement have suffered more severe impacts.
- Children as a vulnerable age category have been subjected to particularly perverse consequences. Educational loss, not only in terms of formal school education but also in terms of the practical life education of a forest tribal group is definitely an impoverishment risk mentioned by most oustees.

The debate about the need for a National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation and for a legal framework for protecting the oustees' entitlements has been going on for a long time in India. A draft National Policy of Resettlement was written years ago in India (Joshi 1997) but the draft has not yet become either a policy or a law. The prolonged lack of policy frameworks only worsens the condition of the oustees.

Impoverishment and often total social disarticulation have been accepted as inevitable in the process of development adopted by us. There is no effort to prevent or mitigate these risks suffered by those who pay the price of development which is never compensated for by the aggregate benefits of development. There is an unpardonable failure to acknowledge the social risks inherent in development induced displacement and this failure causes these risks to unfold unchecked. This happens literally in every large developmental intervention.

Taking all these into consideration, one should be able to recognize the risks and compensate for the costs as a crucial prerequisite for equitable planning.

- The optimal response to anticipated risks is when planners and decision makers start searching for technical alternatives that will obviate the need for displacing people altogether or at least will reduce the number of oustees.
- When it is not possible to avoid displacement, however, the planners and managers should conceive of special measures targeted at each one of the several predicted impoverishment risks rather than being general and vague in their planning.
- When the survey of the people to be displaced and of the assets they are to lose is carried out, risk assessment should be made in the field with the participation of the oustees.
- Avoidance measures, re-development packages, allocation of necessary financial resources and institutional capacities should be the core of the resettlement plans.
- Participation and pro-active responses of the people directly at risk should be encouraged from the onset.
- Transparent information flow and communication between decision makers/planners and the Project Affected People should be established with sincerity and compassion.
- In cases like the Peppara displacement, where the people have been haphazardly resettled without any rehabilitation or scope for just development, coping strategies and resource rejuvenation programmes should be designed. As they are forest dwelling tribal people who are settled in a Wildlife

Sanctuary, their future is intimately linked to the overall forest management strategies of the Kerala Forest Department, unless they opt to come out of the forest and forest resource based lifestyle altogether. From the detailed interviews and discussions with them, it is clear that as it is, they are not prepared to come out of their milieu, nor are they capable of competing and surviving in the commercial world outside. So it is all the more important that their basic survival needs are assured and their natural resources and livelihood means restored.

- The Kanis have already been encouraged to take up rubber cultivation which has destroyed their traditional agriculture totally, and also destabilized whatever remained of the natural vegetation in and around their settlements. It has also affected their mindset in such a way that they are all apathetically waiting for the rubber trees to grow up and start yielding, without doing anything else in their land. Only very few families have even tapioca, banana or green chillies in their land. Thus they are forced to buy all their food from outside whenever there is money in hand. Otherwise the women collect some wild tubers and they make do with one meal a day and starve the rest of the time. It is most essential that there have to be plans and programmes for restoring their agriculture, giving importance to food crops, so that starvation deaths can be avoided and they will feel more secure. Income from cash crops like rubber or pepper should only be a secondary source of livelihood for vulnerable tribal groups who cannot compete with us in the open markets with its manipulations, price fluctuations and bargaining political power centers.
- The Eco Development Programme of the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary should be strengthened and redesigned in such a way that the total participation of every Kani living inside the Sanctuary should be ensured in forest protection, eco-restoration and rejuvenation of the NTFP for wild edible resources and biomass for sale. This alone can assure the long-term economic and physical survival of the Kanis and also the eco-restoration of the invaluable forest ecosystem needed for the welfare of all people.

There is a growing awareness that the State's slogan of 'development' is no longer a politically neutral or socially just term. It is seen to amount to redistribution of resources or a reorganization of production relations in favour of the powerful sections of the society. In the Indian context, the term, development means the building of the infrastructure for urban, industrial and agricultural growth. There is no denying the necessity for this, but as it begins to be perceived more and more that the benefits and costs of these developmental projects are being unevenly distributed in the society, there are widespread protests against them.

While all public policy can be said to be rife with differences between various affected groups, the divergence of interests is destructive when the distribution of benefits is as skewed as in the case of large dams in India. These large dams for generating electricity, supplying drinking water, irrigation etc. have been repeatedly proven to be not only economically unviable in many respects but have often been extremely harmful to the natural environment. In addition they have been socially unjust not only to the people

displaced but also to all those who depended on the river system for survival all along its banks and all the way downstream to the coastal areas. Yet the dominant discourse in India continues to be in favour of the centralization of planning and implementation.

The ecological challenge being put forward by the less endowed, therefore, is closely linked to the control of resources and production. The 'environmental movements' today relate to the demands for empowerment of the poor, decentralization, participation, rural development and social change. They also put forward the philosophy of responsible and prudent resource use taking into consideration the very question of ecological justice along with social and generational justice for the survival of all life on earth.

The 'environment' however has become a popular catchword open to appropriation by the economically and politically powerful. This leads to a highly contested definition of the meaning of the environment, its management, and its links with development. Water management, in particular by large impoundments in India have had a strong European colonial influence in the past and present which needs to be considered critically. The existing technologies and management of water for irrigation, power generation and urban water supply are a colonial legacy. The critique of large dams in India has emerged out of disorganized groups of environmentally concerned people, people's resistance to displacement or to what is seen as a western perspective of development. But the issue itself has catapulted to the international arena largely due to changes in European perceptions. The emerging environmental consciousness in the western world from the seventies has made policy makers more receptive to these vital concerns which in themselves are not new (Gadgil & Guha, 1992).

Social groups in India, however, have defined their environmental concerns in a manner quite different from the West, by relating to issues of livelihood, economy and power (Singh, 1997). These movements which cut across lines of class, caste, community and occupation have debated intensely on the relevance of large dams today. This united perception of the environmental movement helps establish strong support links with other groups working on similar and related issues across the country and thus gives voice to localized issues.

Water is the most vital substance essential for the very survival of all life on earth. It is an important factor in all processes in agricultural and industrial production and in urban lifestyles. Policies aimed at sustainable water use need to pay close attention to the issues of hydraulic property rights. Rights over the use of water are related to the changes in, and control over the production process, which itself is a dynamic one. The use of this resource is constantly manipulated by various social groups in their attempt to maximize individual gains. Larger and larger sections of the society are losing access to water through our water development policies and measures. In reality water has long ceased to be a common property and individualistic gains, industrial and agricultural water misuse and uncontrollable urban demands are increasingly compromising on the sustainability of the water availability.

It should be emphasized that in a tropical agrarian country like India, rights and access to water are extremely important. Leach in his study states this most poignantly – “... what really matters is not the title to the ground, but rights over water and over irrigation ditches. Property in land is worthless unless it is linked with rights to draw water to irrigate the land” (Leach, 1968). The nature of property rights in water, linked to the skewed distribution of land, necessarily debar the majority from greater access to this ‘common’ resource. Sustainable and equitable water use strategies need to establish hydraulic rights to the collective and restore its place as ‘common property’. Thus it is essential to establish institutions to strengthen collective rights to hydraulic property, which may not be difficult given the huge amount of public expenditure in water resource development. We can also depend upon the rich and diverse decentralized traditional water harvesting and water use systems in India to ensure justice, equity and sustainability in our water use.

Alternatives in water resource management would then have to emerge from an alternate definition of development. Broadly speaking development should be based on the twin concepts of equity and sustainability. In fact, equity is ingrained in the idea of sustainability. A socially just, ecologically viable and economically sustainable development strategy would therefore require an overhaul in structure of property rights and institutions that have helped create social inequalities over the ages. Equal access to land, resources and technology would form the foundation for a basic survival strategy. Nature will have to be viewed holistically, and its harvest or extraction should be dependent on the renewability or the replenishability of the resource.

The politics of water has not only been neglected in the study and understanding of Indian developmental politics, but also overlooked by the institutionalized political agencies (Singh, 1997). The voices of those being discriminated against and displaced by the present model of development, is now beginning to be heard due to the concern of social and environmental activists in the country. Apart from merely providing a critique of large dams, people’s groups across the country are also voicing concerns for sustainable and equitable water use. What we need are not just technological interventions but also reconstitution of social relations as well. While the need for land reforms is well known, the importance of hydraulic property rights and responsible water use has not come on the political agenda. The Indian State and the growing democratization of India’s polity provide immense opportunities for changing the nature of development, especially those related to basic survival resources like land, water and natural ecosystems. These localized struggles against large dams, and oral testimonies of the millions of project affected peoples, have the potential of redrawing the social relation and life visions of the people in our country.

## **To Conclude**

This study has only touched the surface of the survival crisis of a tiny section of a community, a few families ousted from their lands. In comparison with most other tribal groups in Kerala, the Kanis are a relatively better adapted tribal community. The Peppara dam forced a number of families to be displaced. They are still living within the Kani

habitat. This particular displacement in comparison with what happened in other developmental sites in Kerala or India or even now happening in Narmada Valley or in many other dam sites was less violent and more considerate. Displacement could be, and has always been indescribably worse. Yet, even this small displacement leaves such deep wounds.

And because of these unhealed wounds, subsequent interactions between the affected section of the society and the outside society get distorted often to the detriment of both groups. Perhaps the EDC set up in Podiyakkala did not take off because an element of extra understanding was lacking. Perhaps such a consideration could have partially compensated for the feeling of past injustices. But routine government programmes do not have the fine-tuning for subtle perceptions.

Violence can be stilled only by justice. It needs insight to understand the roots of human violence. It is even more essential to have deeper, sensitive insights to compensate with justice.

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