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Mismanagement is 'cultivated' in Vattulukki coop society of Attappady



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Topic | Palakkad

Forty years after it was established as a measure to uplift the life of the

tribal population of Kerala's Attappady, a cooperative society has become the epitome of utter mismanagement and negligence.

The Vattulukki Girijan Cooperative Farming Society in Sholayur panchayat in Palakkad district was established in 1980 as a means of livelihood for 150 tribal families. Over the past four decades, the cooperative society has turned out to be nothing but a loss-making venture which offers no hope for the remaining members.

Now there are only 21 families staying in the Vattulukki farm while the others have either died or left the area for their native settlements. The residents of the farm survive on the little income they get from the government-run employment guarantee scheme.

“We were brought here some 40 years ago promising job and livelihood for lifetime. We got work only for 15 years. Now we survive just because of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. If there is no work as per the scheme, we go hungry,” Nanchan Chathan, the head of the settlement, told *Onmanorama*. “The only aid that we get nowadays is the meagre amount to perform the final rites if someone dies. Many who came here when the farm started have died. Some have returned to their original settlements. Those of us who remain here have nowhere to go,” he said.



The Vattuluki Girijan Cooperative Farming Society in Sholayur panchayat was established in 1980 as a means of livelihood for 150 tribal families. Photo: Onmanorama

The story of Vattulukki farm is one of absolute mismanagement and bad planning. The facility was envisaged as a goat farm and the animals were even imported from Australia. However, they couldn't survive the climate of the land. Later, the land was used for cultivating coconut, plantain and mulberry. In 1988, the society started a brick kiln which made some profit. However, it had to be shut down in 2010 following a ban on mining the soil for making bricks.

The farm does some cultivation for namesake now. No new project has been carried out since 2017, leaving the remaining members in utter distress. A section of them have been demanding that the land be redistributed among them so that they can make a living out of it.

The only source of revenue the society has now is the yield from the curry leaves and some coconuts cultivated in the Vattulukki farm. The coconut trees are on its Kulukkoor site. The farm at Pattimalam has been leased out to the Attappady Cooperative Farming Society for Rs 30,000 per year.



Nanchan Chathan, the head of the tribes settled in the Vattulucky farm. Photo: Onmanorama

“Vegetable could be cultivated easily here. The Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) officials are not even ready to do that. The farm is directly under their control. They get their salaries and they are least bothered about the life of the people in the society, T R Chandran, who lives on the society's campus, said. Chandran is a former employee of the Kerala health department and a tribal activist.

Official alibi

Officials who are involved in the management of the farm cites lack of solid leadership as the reason for the failure of the venture. They say a secretary with full powers has to be appointed to manage the society.

As of now, there are no full-time officials to manage the society. The Sholayur tribal extension officer has been given the charge of the manager, while the ITDP's assistant project manager has the charge of secretary.

The society only has a clerk on its payroll now. Even he has been getting a meagre monthly salary of Rs 8,000 for long. A high court order to revise his salary is yet to be implemented.



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Many houses in the Vattulucky farm have been damaged. Photo: Onmanorama

“A full-time secretary and manager are needed to run the society effectively. Without that the society is unlikely to make any profit,” an official said on condition of anonymity.

The officials also proposed a stimulus fund from the government like the budgetary allocation for the Attappady Cooperative Farming Society which claims to be profitable.

Meanwhile, the members of the Attappady society are also not very happy. The workers who live in its Pothuppady coffee plantation say the management has not been carrying out the works on time. They say the yield has dropped drastically over the past few years owing to mismanagement. Over 50 families have moved the Kerala high court seeking redistribution of the farm land among them.

(This is the fourth part of a series investigating the issues concerning the tribal population of Attappady.

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