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# Want to end Attappady woes? Help Adivasis fix their land records



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The biggest lesson from Attappady's continuing miseries should be that there's no quick fix . File Photo

The sad plight of Adivasis of Kerala's Attappady has been in news once again with reports of infant deaths and malnourishment. Experts are busy finding solutions to the deep-rooted problems plaguing the tribal community while politicians want to continue their blame game.

The biggest lesson from Attappady's continuing miseries should be that there's no quick fix for this. The key to initiate a genuine action plan to save the primitive tribes could, however, be to help them get the issues relating to their land records fixed.

Most Adivasi families of Attappady have adequate land passed on to them through generations. The problem is the lack of proper documents, activists working in Attappady point out. Without proper documents of land ownership, many tribespeople of the region are unable to avail of loans from banks or subsidies from government. This is one concern Team Onmanorama came across from several parts of Attappady. On the other hand, a perfect example of how land with proper records could help an Adivasi family was seen in a neighbouring village in Tamil Nadu.

Team Onmanorama met S Vellingiri at Seenkuzhi tribal hamlet in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore district. Seenkuzhi is a small village along the Tholampalayam river which borders Kerala and Tamil Nadu. He has been a successful farmer all his life, making the maximum out of his five-acre land. Even today, he doesn't miss a day in his fields. He cultivates different kinds of millets, pulses and vegetables in his field. He also looks after some cattle. During free time, he works as a carpenter making farming tools. He also finds a small income by collecting and selling twigs used for pujas.

Vellingiri is blessed compared to many Adivasis in his own state and neighbouring Kerala for the simple fact that he has land with proper documents. It enables him to avail of loans for agriculture works. He is happy with all the assistance and services that the government provides.

However, he is firm that one shouldn't depend too much on the government. That is one mistake the tribespeople of Kerala make, he believes.

A section of Adivasi activists in Attappady who are fed up with the government's ineffective spoon-feeding measures for their community subscribe to Vellinkiri's views.

“You can't see a sight like Vellinkiri mooppan's farm anywhere in Attappady. What we have are projects like community kitchen and free ambulance. All these in fact end up making a community lazy,” Sudheer Anakkatty, a folk singer and tribal activist, told Onmanorama. He is one who firmly believes that land issues are the root cause of Attappady's sufferings. “I have no doubt that the Adivasi people would become self-sufficient if their land issues are solved. Steps to resolve the land issues are a must to ensure that Adivasis live with self-esteem,” he said.



S Vellingiri. Photo: Onmanorama

M Sukumaran of All India Krantikari Kisan Sabha, who works for the tribespeople of Attappady, said lack of settlement deed is a major problem faced by Adivasis of Attappady.

“It is wrong to say that Adivasis of Attappady do not have land. Most of them have several acres of land but they don't have proper documents. The properties could be in the name of their ancestors and the present generation has to get the settlement deed registered to use them. Only with that document they can apply for bank loans or even government subsidies. The lack of the documents make it easy for land mafia to encroach on Adivasis' land,” he said.

Sukumaran cited reluctance of village offices to give Adivasis the required tax receipts as a main reason for the difficulties in fixing the issues relating to land documents. “The Adivasis are often made to run from pillar to post for documents. Also it needs a good amount to get land documents fixed. It is not easy to get a legal heir certificate. However, the revenue and tribal departments can get it done for the tribal people within seconds, if they want to,” he said.



Attappady has been witnessing a series of struggles for land rights for decades. Photo: Onmanorama

Legal heir certificate is issued by the government for individuals whose parent/husband dies without leaving a will.

“The governments are interested in purchasing new land for Adivasis and issuing title deeds on forest land. What actually needs to be done is

to help them get proper documents for their own land,” Sukumaran said. Individual and collective efforts to get the land issues of Attappady fixed have been on for long. Little have they achieved, though.

*(This is the final part of a series investigating the issues concerning the tribal population of Attappady.)*

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