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Adivasi kids suffer as nobody wants to rebuild an anganwadi in this Attappady ooru



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Topic | Palakkad

An anganwadi, a preschool facility run by the government, has been

lying closed for years at Aralikkonam in Attappady, Kerala's vast tribal belt which has been in the news of late for the health woes of its population. The sorry state of the building, which is supposed to function as a platform for the physical and mental development of the toddlers in the area, symbolises the institutional negligence the tribal kids face.

Aralikkonam, which falls in the Puthur panchayat, is one of the 192 tribal hamlets (ooru) of Attappady. The anganwadi building was constructed in the area in 2003, according to local people. It has been lying unused for five years, they claimed.



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The ruined building of Aralikkonam anganwadi stands out to be a symbol of official negligence. Photo: Kumar Attappady

All these years, the anganwadi has been functioning at a tiny room in the house of Rajamani, who works as the helper of the preschool. The anganwadi had to be shifted from the official building after its roof started falling. Now, it stands like an apology for a preschool, overrun by bushes.

At present, there are around 10 kids who are in the preschool age in the area. The supplementary foods for them, provided by the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), are supposed to be distributed through the anganwadi. The food items are now distributed at Rajamani's house.

"Children used to come to my house and I cook food for them. As cooked food can't be served to children in groups in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic we distribute raw foods now," Rajamani said.



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The anganwadi has been functioning at a tiny room in the house of Rajamani, who works as the helper of the preschool, for the past few years. Photo: Kumar Attappady

Anganwadis across the country have been lying closed for the past one-and-a-half years. Reports suggest the closure has affected lakhs of children, especially from low-income families. Anganwadis provide childcare, health and nutrition, education, supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health check-up and referral services to households and it matters a lot for the poor families in rural areas. In a place like Attappady, where severe malnourishment is a crucial issue apart from other health concerns, the need to run an anganwadi efficiently is crucial compared to other parts of the state. Amid the tall claims of the government machineries about the slew of works done for the uplift of the tribal population, the Aralikkonam anganwadi stands out to be a symbol of negligence and alleged corruption.

"That the building remained fit to be used only for 15 years itself is proof of corruption in its construction. Those who are responsible for it should be booked. The bad shape of the anganwadi shows the apathy of the panchayat and ICDS even as infant deaths and malnourishment are reported in Attappady," Murugan, a local resident, said.

"In another ooru called Melebhothayar, the condition is similar. The anganwadi there is functioning in a rented facility. There are several oorus with similar condition," he said.



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Aralikkonam is one of the 192 tribal hamlets (ooru) of Attappady. Photo: Kumar Attappady

No contractor?

An official source said the reconstruction of the building got delayed as no contractor was ready to submit tender for the works.

Panchayat member Muhammed Basheer, however, said the anganwadi building will be reconstructed soon. "The panchayat has allocated a fund of Rs 10 lakh for the works and technical sanction has been given. Tender will be ready in a week," he said.

Authorities concerned said reluctance of the tribal people to give away the necessary land for projects like the anganwadi was also a hindrance in the development of Attappady oorus.

(This is the second part of a series investigating the issues concerning the tribal population of Attappady. [First part: There is virtually everything on the menu for tribals in Attappady, except nutrition](#) | [Next: Up above the hill, an Adivasi ooru of Attappady wait for better houses](#))