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Watch: Why adivasis were more vulnerable during Kerala floods

Wayanad, Idukki and Attapadi have a large population of adivasis. And these districts were also the worst affected during the floods of August 2018.



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When the Banasura Dam in Kerala was opened without warning on August 18, 2018, the residents Wayanad woke up the next morning to their homes flooded. The opening of the second largest earthen dam in Asia by the Kerala State Electricity Board affected thousands of people, most of them Adivasis. The area witnessed at least 40 landslides in the catchment area of the Banasura dam on the very first day that it was opened. But when it came to relief and rehabilitation, the residents say that they feel cheated by the government.

Like Wayanad, Attapadi and Idukki, too, have a large population of Adivasis. And during the Kerala floods of August 2018, the people from the marginalised communities say their very social and geographical location made the situation worse for them.

“There are 191 villages in Attapadi. Among those, Pudoor Panchayat and Agali faced the most difficulty due to the floods,” says Shivani, an activist from Attapadi, “The isolated areas were Murugalam and Kinattinkara because Bhavani river flows that way and people couldn't cross it or seek help. There was no network on the phone and they were stuck there in that situation.”

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“So in that situation, the government was not focussed on getting help to such places. They were focussing only on people who live by the roadside,” she says.

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Activists say that the Kurumbas in Attapadi got help only because of citizen initiatives, and the government machinery could not reach them.

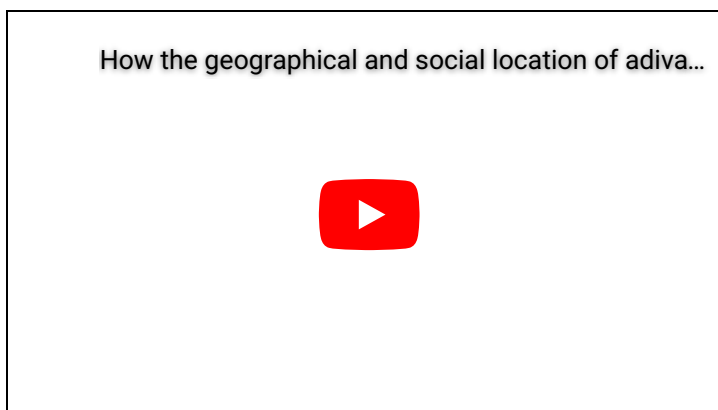
“Five relief camps were opened and functioned here, but it was not possible to get the Kurumba people to those camps or do any rescue work for them,” Shivani says. When the citizen led rescue and relief team she was working with came to know that people were stuck in these areas, they decided take relief materials to them, as the adivasis couldn’t reach the camps.

“The government says that there are no isolated villages in their records. But if you go to those villages you can see. In landslides, many trees have fallen on the houses. Many houses have been destroyed. That has not come in government records,” she says.

And where they were able to reach relief camps, the facilities provided to them were dismal, say activists.

“In a place called Mampad, the relief camp provided for the adivasi community was an under construction house, and 150 members were accommodated in that specific house. But the government provided an entire school for just 10 people in other areas. So the preferences in rehabilitation camps itself is a kind of caste discrimination,” says Dinu Veyil, a student activist who was part of the relief work in Kerala.

Watch the full documentary here:



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