

Project Title:
**On the Cross Roads: Unearthing the Socio Economic Challenges
faced by the Unwed Mothers of the Paniya Tribe of Wayanad
District- Kerala**

**Report of the Minor Research Project supported
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New Delhi**

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Certificate

I, Dr. Jose Boban. K, do hereby declare that this research report entitled *On the Cross Roads: Unearthing the Socio Economic Challenges faced by the Unwed Mothers of the Paniya Tribe of Wayanad District- Kerala*, is an original work done by me under the scheme of Minor Research Project of University Grants Commission, New Delhi. The Approval Letter was dated 25/04/2016 bearing a number 2353-MRP/15-16/KLKE035/UGC-SWRO. I also declare that this report or any part of it has not been used for any other academic or non-academic purpose.

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Publications based on this UGC Minor Research Project:

1. Received acceptance letter from the Editor of the Research Journal *Kerala Sociologist* for the publication of an article entitled *Psycho-social problems of the Children of Tribal unwed mothers*. This volume of the journal will be published in December 2018.
2. Received acceptance letter from the Editor of a book entitled *Health and Well being: The Tribal Perspective*, for publishing a chapter on the *Problems of Tribal Unwed Mothers*. This is an edited volume to be published by the end of this year.

Preface

The present research on the tribal unwed mothers of Wayanad district of Kerala was made possible due to the support of various agencies and persons. First of all let me acknowledge with gratitude the financial support rendered by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi for undertaking this study as part of the scheme on Minor Research Project.

Only due to the cooperation of the subjects of this study; tribal unwed mothers and other members of the tribal community including the leaders of settlements this study was completed successfully. During the stage of field investigations and primary data collection many local people and officials like ASHA workers, ICDS supervisors, *Anganwadi* workers and helpers, and tribal promoters assisted the principal investigator and other field investigators a lot in identifying the subjects of study and for arranging the interviews. Their presence and persuasion gave confidence to the unwed mothers to open up. I also express thanks to my former research student Dr. Meena Nair. S for the support during the field work. A word of appreciation and gratitude for all the field investigators for the painstaking efforts they have taken for the collection of primary data.

I also express my thanks to the management, teachers, office staff and librarian of Loyola College of Social Sciences, Thiruvananthapuram for the support and for providing the needed infrastructural facilities.

I hope that the findings and observations of this study would be useful for planners, administrators, voluntary workers and all others working for the welfare of tribes in general and tribal unwed mothers in particular.

Dr. Jose Boban. K

Principal Investigator

Executive Summary

The present study primarily focuses on the problems experienced by the unwed mothers in the Paniyan tribal community living in the Wayanad district of Kerala. This research report is the outcome of a qualitative research carried out among the unwed mothers by following the approved social science research methodology. The nuances of the problems faced by unwed mothers in a particular community were presented in the backdrop of the general living conditions of tribes in Kerala.

Wayanad is the home of many tribal communities. This district stood first in the state in terms of concentration of tribal population. Paniyan, the tribe selected for this study is the numerically largest tribal community in Kerala. They mainly live in Wayanad district and in the neighboring districts of Kannur and Malappuram. Paniyans were bonded labourers in the past and now they live mainly as agricultural laborers in the plantations as well as in the land of the big landlords.

A serious problem affecting many of the tribal communities in some districts of Kerala namely, Palakkad, Kasargod and Wayanad is that of the unwed mothers. In different ways the tribal girls are cheated and they become unwed mothers that indicate their vulnerability. Tribal girls are exploited either by the members of the tribal communities or by non-tribal outsiders. The unwed mothers are treated as a burden to their families. Therefore, the victims are forced to take care of themselves and their children.

Several initiatives were being taken by the Government of Kerala to tackle this issue. *Snehasparsham* Project for Unwed Mothers was implemented through the Kerala Social Security Mission coming under the Social Justice Department. Under this project, a monthly financial aid is given to tribal unwed mothers.

This study identifies the root causes contributing to the origin of this problem and put forward some recommendations before the government and other authorities concerned with the well being of the tribal unwed mothers regarding the rehabilitation of such victims and also for preventing the occurrence of the same.

The study revealed that finding a livelihood is the most serious concern of unwed mothers. Therefore steps are to be taken for providing them skills to start some self employment projects. The study recommended the involvement of agencies like *Kudumbasree* Mission for providing such opportunities for the unwed mothers. The researcher also identified that proper attention should be given for the healthy growth of the children of the unwed mothers.

The study also noticed that the problem of unwed motherhood is also related to the cultural changes in the tribal communities due to the contact with outsiders. The persons responsible for the pregnancy of tribal girls are not taken to task in most of the cases. Another serious problem is that the legislations regulating the marriage practices are imposed on the tribes and their customary practices are totally neglected. There is need for separate legislation for regulating the tribal marriages.

The study concluded that the problem of unwed mothers is a byproduct of the general socio-economic backwardness of the tribes and it can be set right only by adopting a more humane approach towards them. The government and non tribal society shall extend a helping hand to them by giving their due share in the fruits of development.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APL – Above Poverty Line
BPL – Below Poverty Line
CSW – Committed Social Worker
EDC – Eco Development Committee
FRC – Forest Rights Committee
GP- Grama Panchayat
IAY – Indira Awas Yojana
ICDS – Integrated Child Development Services
ITDP – Integrated Tribal Development Project
KELSA - Kerala State Legal Services Authority
KIRTADS – Kerala Institute for Research, Training and Development Studies
KILA – Kerala Institute for Local Administration
KMSS – Kerala Mahila Samakhya Society
LSGD – Local Self Government Department
MG NREGS – Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
NCST - National Commission for Scheduled Tribes
NGO – Non Governmental Organisation
NTFP – Non Timber Forest Produce
OBC – Other Backward Class
PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRI - Panchayati Raj Institution
PUCL - People’s Union of Civil Liberties
SC – Scheduled Caste
SHG – Self Help Group
ST – Scheduled Tribe
STDD – Scheduled Tribe Development Department
TP – Tribal Promoter
VSS – Vana Samrakshana Samiti

Chapter one

Introduction

The present study primarily focuses on the problems experienced by the unwed mothers in the Paniya tribal community living in the Wayanad district of Kerala. This research report is the outcome of a qualitative research carried out among the unwed mothers by following the approved social science research methodology. An understanding of the general background of tribes in Kerala is useful while unfolding the nuances of the problems faced by unwed mothers in a particular community. Therefore, the first chapter of this research report vividly presents a general profile of the tribal situation in Kerala.

Even though tribals constitute only a minuscule of Kerala society, their issues and problems always generates many a discussion in the state. In Malayalam they are known as 'Adivasis', indicating they are the original inhabitants of this land. In the modern parlance, they can be treated as an ethnic group with their own unique culture, language and origin. At the same time, tribes in Kerala are divided among themselves into a number of communities. According to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list, which is prepared to give them constitutional protection, there are thirty six communities. This is a list which can be revised by the Union Government. Therefore, there are communities outside the ST list, who consider themselves as tribes even though they may not be officially recognized by the government. Also there is an OEC list in which some tribes are included, just for giving them educational benefits.

There is no clear-cut definition of the word tribe, even though many anthropologists proposed various definitions. There is no unanimity among anthropologists regarding the reliability of any of these definitions as different definitions emphasize on different characteristics of tribes. But all of them have agreement on some of the unique features of tribes that are related to their historical origin and culture.

Tribe – A Definition

Though the Constitution of India devotes an entire schedule for listing the scheduled tribes of India the word tribe is nowhere defined in the Constitution except in the following manner. The scheduled tribes are “the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which the President of India may specify by public notification” (Article 342). The Backward Classes Commission appointed by the President of India in 1953 was entrusted with the task of laying down the criteria for the determination of the scheduled tribes. It suggested the following criteria: “They (the tribes) live apart in hills and even when they live in plains, they lead a separate, excluded existence and are not assimilated in the main body of the people; scheduled tribes may belong to any religion. They are listed as scheduled tribes because of the kind of life led by them” (Saksena, 1978: 6).

The criteria adopted in the Constitution of India are not satisfactory from an Anthropological point of view. They are not giving any insight into the cultural and social life of the tribes. Therefore, we have to depend on the views put forward by professional anthropologists. Even though many anthropological definitions are available they only increase the ambiguity of the term by emphasizing certain distinctive characteristics of the tribal society. In order to get a holistic picture of a tribe we have to integrate the distinctive features scattered in different definitions. After making an analysis of the various definitions of the term tribe, Vidyarthi and Rai (1977:148) pointed out that tribe is a social group of people who have the following features, viz,

1. A definite territory or who claim to occupy a common territory;
2. A common name;
3. A common dialect;
4. A common culture;
5. Behaviour of an endogamous group;
6. Common taboos;

7. Existence of distinctive social and political systems;
8. Full faith in their leaders; and
9. Self sufficiency in their distinct economy.

These features of the tribal communities give us clarity about this concept even though some of these features may not have universal application. Moreover, through the implementation of many of the tribal development programmes by the central and state governments in the post Independence period for integrating them with the non-tribal mainstream society, the tribes are unable to maintain their unique social, cultural and economic life. Therefore, unique and distinctive tribal characteristics are no more found in this country except in the case of some minor tribes living in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands totally isolated from the non-tribal society.

National Context

The tribes are often treated as separate from the mainstream society as they are following a unique way of life with their own specific historical background. In the pre Independence period, the colonial administration was following a policy of isolation towards them as their early experiences with the tribes were not so good. When the British government attempted to establish tea plantations in the north-eastern part of the country, by encroaching tribal land, they had to face fierce resistance from them. The colonial administration couldn't understand the importance of land in tribal life. When the British government treated land only as an economic commodity, tribes had multitude of relations with their land including religious significance. They never practiced the individual or private ownership of land, but followed the collective ownership of land by the community. Tribes were following a subsistence economy and never exploit natural resources with a profit motive. For them land was everything which provided them food, shelter and clothing and so they worshipped nature, land and natural objects like trees, waterfalls, animals etc.

So, when the British exploited the natural resources, by establishing plantations, mines, dams etc, the tribes revolted against it. However, the British also brought forest conservation legislations in the name of protecting forests. Indian Forest Act -1927 was the most prominent one among these. But through the provisions of the Forest Acts government auctioned the timber inside the forests to increase their revenue. On the other hand, the Forest Acts also denied the customary rights of the tribes over forest resources. Tribes could not understand these discriminations and revolted against it. Therefore, the colonial government declared the tribal concentrated territories as Scheduled Areas and brought special administrative mechanisms there. Tribes were directly under the control of the Provincial Governor and their interactions with the non-tribes were restricted by law. As British government was following a policy of isolation towards the tribes, it adversely affected their development.

Thus the earlier tribal problems were related to land. Even before the first major agitation for Independence in 1857, tribal revolts against the colonial rule were many, including the famous Santhal Rebellion of 1855 in Central India. Some historians opined that these tribal rebellions inspired other communities to raise their voice against the British rule.

When India got Independence, Central Government gave tribes all possible care and support as they were a marginalized group. However, there were different approaches towards tribal development (Doshi and Jain, 2001). The most prominent were Isolation, Assimilation and Integration. Famous British anthropologist, Verrier Elwin who was the adviser to the Prime Minister on tribal affairs promoted the policy of isolation. He believed that tribal culture is unique and should be preserved. Any contact between the tribes and the non-tribes will contribute to the decline of the tribal culture. Therefore tribal communities can be settled in 'National Parks' for avoiding the contamination of tribal culture. But Elwin was criticized for this policy. The critics said that Elwin was treating tribes as museum pieces, and isolating them would be detrimental for their development. Anyway, this policy was not accepted by the central government.

Famous Indian anthropologist, G.S.Ghurye was the proponent of the second approach - Assimilation. Ghurye believed that tribes are not outside the caste system of Hindus. They can be equated with lower caste Hindus occupying the lowest rungs of the caste hierarchy. Therefore, the tribes should be treated like other lower caste Hindu communities and in order to overcome their socio-economic backwardness, special support can be given to them by the government through various development projects, so that in course of time, they can be fully assimilated to the mainstream society. He did not find any reason for the preservation of tribal culture. This approach was also not accepted as many others treated tribes as different from the Hindu community and a complete assimilation would not be beneficial for them.

Mainly the bureaucrats and the administrators, who are in charge of tribal development, proposed the third approach of Integration. This approach admits the unique culture and way of life of tribes. At the same time, they realize that tribes experience many socio economic problems so that they cannot be left alone. They need support from government. What is needed is to give opportunities for tribes to achieve development so that they can choose what is needed for them. Nothing should be imposed on them. This approach is widely accepted among the scholars and administrators.

Tribal situation in Kerala

The Western Ghats and its peripheries form the main abode of tribes in Kerala. Of the 36 ST communities in the State five are classified as Primitive Tribal Groups due to their extreme socio-economic backwardness. The primitive tribal communities are *Cholanaickans*, *Kattunaickans*, *Koragas*, *Kurumbas* and *Kadars*. They are most backward and numerically small in size. They constitute roughly five percent of the total tribal population in the state. Highest concentration of ST population is in Wayanad (37.4 %) followed by Idukki and Palakkad districts.

For any social scientist tribal situation in Kerala unfolds unique features in comparison with rest of India. Even though certain number of communities was identified by the state as tribes, they are not showing uniform characteristics. On one extreme, we can place relatively advanced tribal communities like *Mala Arayans* of Kottayam, Kanis of Thiruvananthapuram or *Kurichiyas* of Wayanad who have achieved good education, better employment, good houses, vehicles, and many other modern facilities at par with the non-tribes. They are enjoying a decent standard of living. On the other extreme, there are five primitive tribal groups whose socio-economic conditions are really pathetic. In between, there are so many other communities, who are occupying the different rungs of the development ladder. The Paniya of Wayanad district is the numerically biggest community.

These diversities are a challenge for the planners and policy makers, while formulating development projects for them. Of course, special treatment is extended to the primitive tribal groups. However, for others, there are no such official demarcations to give special support based on the gravity of backwardness of each group. As *Attappady* area comes under the only tribal block in the state, the tribes inhabiting there are also getting special support from both central and state Governments.

Actually, there is a provision for descheduling of communities in the ST list. That means, President of India, based on the recommendations of the Union Government, can revise the list. He can remove the name of one community in the list or include the name of another community. This is done in order to remove those communities who have already achieved self reliance in terms of their development. Also if another community which is not in the list but experiencing backwardness can be included in the list in order to give preferential treatment. However, there are wide spread criticisms about the way in which descheduling takes place. Often it is alleged that alterations are made in the list on the basis of political considerations. Therefore many empowered communities are continuing in the list and grabbing most of the opportunities set apart for tribes. This keeps the

backward communities to remain in their position as they have no capacity to compete with the advanced groups.

For outsiders, all tribal communities constitute a homogenous group. But a closer look into the characteristics of each one of them shows that they also maintain notions of inferiority and superiority in the inter-tribal interactions. For example, the *Kurichiyas* of Wayanad are famous for their notions of ritual purity. Outsiders are not allowed to enter inside their houses. Other tribal communities are considered inferior to them. The present author also noticed such notions of inferiority or superiority in the interactions between *Muthuvans* and *Hill Pulayas* of Idukki district. *Muthuvans* consider themselves superior to *Hill Pulayas* and not interested to share food with them.

In addition, we can see differences in their dialects, myths of origin, food habits, dressing, art forms, occupation etc. While visiting the traditional hamlets of tribes, which incidentally are very few now in the state, one can notice that all households in such hamlets belong to a single community. This is very beneficial for them to maintain their traditional culture. However, in many of the settlements in the fringe areas of forest one can see more than one tribal group living together. These are settlements established by the government where members of different tribal communities are resettled after they were displaced from somewhere else. Here they have no choice but to accept the land provided by the government. In such situations, each tribal group may not get chance to preserve their traditional culture. So their younger generations lose their traditional community structure.

The media often covers the tribal life and even play advocacy role for them. Actually, the tribes first find a place in feature films. But in those movies, a totally stereotyped image of tribes are presented. Here, the tribes are always presented as half naked, wearing colourful dresses and wearing ornaments made of teeth of wild animals like leopard or tiger. They are shown in such a way as they are always in a happy mood, singing and dancing before the jungle Gods. Such type of exaggerated picturisation of tribes creates

an impression in the mind of non-tribes that tribes are unique and extraordinary people. Some even think that tribes have magical powers and they know medicines for all serious ailments etc.

In the more recent period, especially after the proliferation of television channels, realistic presentation of tribal life is available. The media personnel often take initiative to visit the tribal hamlets and telecast or print their problems so that it is helpful for inviting the attention of the government to such issues. Media also give support to tribal agitations taking place in different parts of the State. TV channels nowadays regularly conduct investigations on corruption and inefficiency associated with the implementation of development projects for tribes. Thus media act as a watch dog which is really helpful for the tribes. However, there are also criticisms that some of the stories of the media on the tribal issues are not well supported by facts, but cooked up stories.

Status of Women

Among the tribal communities the women enjoy an egalitarian position in comparison with men. They contribute to the wellbeing of the family by working as manual labourers and also function as home makers. The opinion of the women, especially the elderly women is taken seriously while taking decisions in the family. The women are also bold enough to express their opinion without any inhibition even in front of outsiders. They have an inner strength to participate in agitations for protecting their fundamental rights.

Tribal Education

Tribal education is another thrust area. Even though schools, *Anganwadis* etc are provided in tribal areas, still the educational progress is not encouraging. Tribal hostels are also functioning in order to accommodate tribal students both boys and girls. Hostels provide food, accommodation and entertainment facilities. Tuition facilities are also available in some hostels. But the number of students making use of these facilities is

limited. Though the tribal children communicate in their dialect in their households, they are forced to study the lessons in the school in Malayalam, which is a foreign language for them. Most of the contents in the curriculum are subjects or themes which has no connection with their culture. So, for the tribal children, it is difficult to digest. The pattern of syllabi and teaching methods are not useful in the development of their life skills. Besides, many parents are not aware of the need and importance of education. Hence it is difficult for them to motivate their children. Infrastructural facilities in some schools are poor, which is also a limiting factor.

Many parents are not ready to send their girl children to hostels mainly because of some incidents of sexual harassment reported in the media. Even though these are rare incidents, still it has an impact on the parents. If at all they send their girl children to hostels, many parents call them back after they have attained puberty. Anxieties of the parents are true to a certain extent as the facilities and security in many hostels are far from satisfactory. After improving the conditions in the hostels the authorities can also provide awareness programmes for the parents in order to instill confidence in their mind. The education department can also include more topics on tribal culture in the text books. While preparing the contents of such lessons, authors must be realistic. Rather than giving a romantic picture of tribal culture, they must showcase the true facts. This is helpful for the non-tribal students to develop an empathetic and respectful attitude towards tribal communities.

Tribal Medicine

The tribal communities have always relied on a rich stock of traditional knowledge in health and medicines that was transmitted from generation to generation. These communities have a store house of knowledge about their geographical flora and fauna, and they know how to treat ailments. They believe that maintaining harmonic relationship with the supernatural forces ensure protection from diseases and other calamities. The various methods and techniques developed by the tribes are not the

results of scientific experiments but evolved through trial and error methods. But most of them can stand the rigorous test of the scientific standards of modern medicine.

Tribal communities live in harsh environments and are thus vulnerable to various diseases and accidents. However, they have no scientifically proven method to tackle adverse situations like famine, diseases, epidemics and the ultimate calamity of death. Therefore they depend upon empirical knowledge and methods which are often expressive and symbolic. They retain those techniques which have solved their problems and in course of time such practices become part of their culture.

Having lived in harmony with nature for centuries, the tribes have identified various herbs which can heal a variety of diseases. They have no side effects. This indigenous stream of herbal medicine gets increased attention nowadays and more and more people, not only belonging to tribal community, but those from the non-tribal society, approach the tribal medical experts to take their medicine. Their approach to curing the disease not only includes taking the medicine, but also following some diets along with it. They may also suggest some changes in the lifestyle also depending on the type of diseases.

The phenomenon of medical pluralism is very much alive now in the case of tribal communities. Today the tribes are exposed to various kinds of medical systems in addition to their own. Even though many of them accept modern medicine as efficacious they also preserve their own ethno medicine. They consider that only ethno medicine can heal certain type of diseases, especially those caused by supernatural forces. They often make arbitrary division of diseases and use both modern and ethno medicine selectively.

However, even in this bleak scenario there are certain developments that are giving some hope for the continuation of tribal ethno medicine to the future. Among the agencies which are taking initiative for supporting ethno medicine *Kerala Institute for Research Training and Development Studies of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes* (KIRTADS) is most important name in this regard. This is a research institute run

by the Government of Kerala for the benefit of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities of the state. It is located in Kozhikode and doing commendable work for the promotion of ethno medicine.

Agitations for Land

There is a long history of agitations by tribes for getting agricultural land. A vast majority of the tribes follow the occupation of agriculture. So it is vital for them to have their own land. Tribal land alienation is coupled with the migration of non-tribes to hilly areas of the state in search of fertile agricultural land. This process started in the pre Independence period, ie; in the 1940s and continued in 1950s even after Independence. In the 1950s, when Shri. Pattom Thanupillai was the chief minister of Travancore-Cochin state, he introduced a new scheme known as *Grow more Food* and encouraged agriculturists of the plains to migrate to the high ranges and convert the forest into agricultural land, to cultivate food crops including rice. This was mainly for overcoming serious food shortage caused due to the Second World War. The government support encouraged large number of ordinary people to migrate to high ranges. According to the Socio-Economic Survey conducted by the Government of Kerala in 1979 in tribal areas most of the migrations to Malabar took place in the 1950s. By 1976 tribes in Malabar lost 9857 acres of land due to migration. According to a study conducted by the Kerala Agricultural University in 1992 only through migration tribes of northern districts lost two thirds of their land (Mohandas, 1992). In Wayanad tribes were the original inhabitants and formed the majority population. But due to the large scale migration of non-tribes now the tribes constitute only a minority in the population of the district.

All this resulted in the influx of large number of non-tribes into the tribal areas. In 1940s or 1950s this problem was not serious as tribes could move into more interior parts of the forests when their land was encroached by non-tribes. Overall population density was also less in the High Ranges during those days. However, the problem became serious in

1970s when the area of forests declined and both Central and State governments brought many control over establishing hamlets inside the forests.

Tribes were also affected by the development projects constructed in the hilly terrains. Many hydroelectric dams were constructed for the generation of electricity and for irrigation. In addition, tribes were also displaced from their land for the construction of roads, including highways and plantations. Most of these tribes were resettled by the government. However, some have ended up on the banks of rivers, roadsides etc.

Government also brought many rehabilitation packages for the displaced tribes and also for those tribes who were under the system of slavery. In Wayanad, government established estates in Pookod and Sugandhagiri, mainly for rehabilitating tribes who were bonded labourers. Houses were constructed for them and employment opportunities were provided. Tribes had control over the functioning of the estates even though the overall administration was managed by the government officials. Land in the estates was also given to the tribes for constructing houses. Similarly, agricultural projects were started in different villages in Attappady like Puthuppady, Chindakki etc to give land and income for tribes. However, these estates and farms are not functioning well. Productivity is very less and one cannot find any observable improvement in the conditions of tribal beneficiaries. What is needed is to make these farm projects self reliant and profit making by improving their management so that the tribes who are part of these projects can be economically self sufficient.

The Forest Rights Act – 2006

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, is a key piece of forest legislation passed in India on 18 December 2006. The law concerns the rights of forest-dwelling communities to land and other resources, denied to them over decades as a result of the continuance of colonial forest laws in India. Before the passing of this Act Indian forests were governed by two main laws the Indian Forest Act -1927 and the Wild Life (Protection) Act -1972. These Acts

had severe provisions so that the forest dwellers were always under the threat of eviction. The new Act is intended to recognize land ownership rights for those lands that are already under cultivation as on 13 December 2005 and not to grant title to any new lands. The tribes of Kerala welcomed this Act as they expected that it will protect their customary rights over the forest and its resources. They also expect that by making use of the provisions of this Act they will be able to get back their land which was alienated earlier. However, these expectations are yet to be satisfied due to the lopsided implementation of this Act. Even now large number of tribal families in Kerala has no land of their own.

Alcoholism among Tribes

It is a serious problem affecting the well being of tribes in many areas of the state. Actually, liquor was prohibited by the State Government in the Attappady region as it is the most tribal concentrated area in the state. In spite of these measures taken by the government illicit liquor and even foreign liquor is readily available in Attappady. Not even men, but many tribal women are also addicted to liquor. It takes away whatever little money they have and keeps them in poverty. Also when pregnant women drink it affects the foetus and sometime leads to miscarriages. Moreover, it contributes to malnutrition and a variety of other health problems. Alcoholism is a problem in many other regions of the state like Wayanad, Malappuram, Idukki etc. Many tribes visit liquor shops regularly and some depend on illicit liquor traders. Proper enforcement of the law by the excise officials is required in order to control this menace. Moreover, awareness programmes are to be organized against alcoholism in the tribal settlements with the cooperation of NGOs.

Tribes and Panchayati Raj Institutions

Modern three tier Panchayati Raj Institutions were introduced in India through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts passed by the Indian Parliament in 1992. Later

the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act was passed by the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 1994. The first elections were held in 1995 in Kerala.

In India the tribal dominated regions are declared as Scheduled Areas in order to give special protection for tribes and to ensure their development. Such territories are identified in the Indian Constitution under 5th and 6th Schedules. The 6th Schedule areas comprise of regions coming as part of four states in the North-eastern parts of the country whereas the regions that come under 5th Schedule are widely scattered in the country under nine states.

The legislation on Panchayati Raj passed by the parliament in 1992 is not applicable in its original form in the Scheduled Areas. Therefore a new legislation was passed in 1996 by modifying the original Act in order to suit with the conditions prevailing in the tribal concentrated areas. These regions are controlled by an Act known as *Provisions of Panchayati Raj (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act – 1996* which is popularly known as *PESA Act*. As per the provisions of this Act in the Scheduled Areas all the seats of the chairpersons in the panchayat council is reserved for the tribes and 50% of members' seats are also reserved for tribes. Land rights of the tribes are fully protected in the Scheduled Areas. In Kerala there is no Scheduled Area as the numerical strength of tribes is less here in comparison with other states. However, the leaders of tribal movements in Kerala demand that the tribal concentrated areas in the State like Attapady and Wayanad should be declared as scheduled areas. Then the tribes will get better role in the administration of the region especially through the Panchayati Raj institutions. The problem of land alienation and other atrocities against tribes can be totally prevented in scheduled areas.

Panchayati Raj system can be utilized to cater to the needs of the tribes. Tribal *Oorukootam* which is equivalent to the Grama Sabha of a ward is the most grass root level organization. *Oorukootam* gives opportunity for any tribal person who is a voter to express his opinion in the meeting. This is an attempt to bring democracy in the process

of planning and implementation to the grass root level. Many persons are making use of this opportunity. On the other hand, there are some drawbacks in the effective functioning of *Oorukootam*. In some regions, the rate of participation is very less and very few women are present in the meeting. It is also noticed that in some *Oorukootams*, members of different tribal communities participate. In such occasions members of one community dominate and they control the proceedings. Members of the other community remain as spectators as they lack confidence to open up. Therefore the decision making process may not be proper. In some other occasions, it is found that the panchayat officials come for *Oorukootams* with their agenda. Then, they will dominate over the proceedings and try to impose their decisions on the members. The officials will announce what are the development projects that are being proposed for the next year and who are going to be the beneficiaries. Then without any discussions the proposal will be approved by the members. The real purpose of *Oorukootams* is foiled in such occasions.

Police and Tribes

The state police department which takes care of the internal security and maintenance of law and order of the state is also an agency which interacts with the different sections of the people in a multitude of ways. In the recent period police department attempts to project a people friendly image of it as even today people generally have fear in their mind towards the police force. With this aim the *Janamaithri Suraksha Project* was launched in 2008 which is the Community Policing initiative of the Kerala police. This is a state level project with its presence in all districts of Kerala.

Today the police force is giving special attention to the tribal areas in the context of the emerging threat from the subversive forces like the Maoists. Their presence in the forests of Kerala from the beginning of 2013 especially in the northern districts is a well accepted fact. Experiences of other states show that the Maoists generally operate from the tribal areas. Even though the state government implements various development projects for tribes still there are many unresolved problems. The Maoists attempt to

exploit this situation. They give a false sense of hope to the tribes and try to get their support in extremist activities. According to P. Vahid, DySP of Kerala police “ As in other states, the Maoists as a preliminary step, are visiting these (tribal) colonies, interacting with the tribes, understanding and empathizing with their problems and ultimately propagating their ideology and strategy as the panacea for all ‘sufferings’, both real and imagined. Maoists, by their articulate, passionate presentation, which carefully incorporates in depth facts about the day to day lives of the *Adivasis*, magnifying their sufferings and distorting to suit their interests, the Governmental attitude towards the suffering tribes, so as to convince them that the only alternative is to take up arms and fight to the finish against a ‘heartless’ and apathetic Government who would otherwise preside over their doom” (2014: 43). When Maoists operating in this manner there is great chance that they can easily mislead the simple, often less educated tribal people. That is why the police department is taking steps to watch the activities going on in the tribal settlements.

The top authorities of the police department decided to take steps to be more close to tribal settlements in order to get their support against the operations against the subversive forces. The *Janamaithri Suraksha Project* has great relevance in this regard. Special attention is given to four northern districts of the state viz, Malappuram, Kozhikode, Wayanad and Kannur. Under the leadership of the State Nodal Officer the officers of the *Janamaithri* police visited many of the tribal settlements in these districts and enquired about their problems. It was found that even though the condition of the tribes in Kerala is better than their brethren in other states, still there are many problems like poor housing and sanitation facilities, lack of drinking water facilities, absence of good roads and electricity, inadequacies in educational and medical facilities etc. Moreover, concrete steps were taken to solve the problems identified during such visits. Some of these problems can be solved by the police department itself whereas for solving other problems cooperation and involvement of other departments like revenue, agriculture, education, health etc are required. In such occasions district level meetings

are convened with the participation of officials from other departments concerned as well as representatives of NGOs. Such a meeting was recently held in Wayanad district. Some of the suggestions came as an outcome of the visits to the tribal hamlets are given below:

1. Take measures to solve the problem of malnutrition among tribal women and children. Rejuvenate the functioning of the Primary Health Centres.
2. Create a congenial environment for the primary and continuing education of the tribal children.
3. Improve the facilities in the offices of the Tribal Development Department through which all the welfare programmes for the tribes are implemented.
4. Strengthen the activities of the Excise and Forest Departments in order to check the problem of increasing sale and consumption of liquor in tribal settlements.
5. Avoid intermediaries in the construction of houses for the tribes and construct the houses with the participation of the tribal beneficiaries themselves.
6. Take immediate measures to issue ration cards and identity cards to each tribal person who does not possess it now.
7. All other government departments should extend their cooperation to the *Janamaithri* police which have taken the initiative to solve the issues in the tribal settlements (*Janamaithri Police News Letter – May/June, 2014*).

The increased contacts between police officers and tribes can be utilized by the tribes when they face problems from the non tribal settlers or anybody else. They can also overcome their fear in approaching the police for any help.

Detribalization

In spite of the various initiatives of the government agencies and NGOs for the development of tribes, still many issues prevail. Poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, high infant mortality, poor housing etc are some of the burning issues of tribes in Kerala. Land alienation and the consequent landlessness is yet another serious problem. Even

though the state government evolved many innovative programmes for the improvement of their education, health, agriculture etc, often the targets are not achieved.

Even today, tribes are keeping a distance from non-tribes. The goal of integration with the main stream society is yet to be achieved. Relatively backward tribal communities are more suspicious of the non-tribal locals residing in their area. This is due to their bitter experiences of the past. Even after adopting the non tribal culture to a great extent, still most of the tribes maintain the fundamental principles of their own culture. Tribes follow the food habits, dressing patterns, modes of entertainment and language of non-tribes to a great extent. However, they have more difficulty in following the religion and value system of non-tribes. The marital relationship between tribes and non-tribes is very low. Occasionally, certain love marriages take place. Otherwise, each party selects their spouse from their own group. This is one reason for the lack of integration of tribes with the mainstream society. Otherwise, a hybrid population would have been developed due to the mixing of genetic properties between tribes and non-tribes.

Many anthropologists identified the process of detribalization among many tribal groups. It means that tribes are losing many of their original cultural elements which are replaced by the cultural traits of non-tribal communities. In anthropological terms, this is a type of acculturation process which is resulting in the diffusion of cultural elements from the non-tribal communities. This detribalization process has influenced more the relatively educated and employed members of the tribal groups. After getting white collar employment, many of the youngsters are leaving their original hamlet. They generally settle down in the urban areas with their wife and children. Often they are ashamed of their tribal identity. Consequently, their community never gets any benefits from such persons. While interacting with these employed and educated tribes it can be found that they are fully integrated with the non-tribal middle class society and have abandoned all their traditional characteristics. They are no more fond of the culture inherited from their fore-fathers. They incorporate the non-tribal value system and keep their children away from the indigenous culture. Therefore, the present generation of children growing up in

the urban areas loses all their tribal characteristics. Some of them are even ashamed of revealing that they belong to tribal community. At the same time they make use of their tribal identity in order to get the concessions and benefits from the government in the form of reservation.

Tribal unwed mothers

A serious problem affecting many of the tribal communities in some districts of Kerala namely, Palakkad, Kasargod and Wayanad is that of the unwed mothers. This problem also exists with less severity in other districts with considerable tribal population as in Idukki. In different ways the tribal girls are cheated and they become unwed mothers that indicate their vulnerability. Tribal girls are exploited either by the members of the tribal communities themselves or by non-tribal outsiders. The unwed mothers are a burden to their families. Often the family members are not in a position to support the unwed mothers as they themselves are struggling to earn a livelihood for them. Therefore, the unwed mothers are forced to take care of themselves and their child or children.

Even though the exploitation of tribal girls; many of them become mothers even before the age of 18 years, is an offence from a legal perspective, the victims have no capacity to take any action against the perpetrators. When complaints are lodged in the local police stations, sometimes by the parents of the girls, often the offenders bribe the police so that the victims never get justice. Moreover, the society treats the unwed mothers as persons with loose morals and naturally they are targets of social stigma. Eventually, they are supposed to be supported by the government as the state has responsibility for all the citizens as our country adopts the concept of welfare state. Even though there is a pension scheme for the unwed mothers the amount is quite insufficient and the payment is irregular. Now there is no specific welfare scheme for the children of unwed mothers other than the normal welfare projects covering all children in the tribal community.

“Even as the govt. claims that all kinds of social security safeguards are in place to check the exploitation of tribal girls and women, the number of unwed tribal mothers has

more than doubled since 2002 in Kerala. The tribal women of Attappadi, Kasargod and Wayanad, top the list of the unwed mothers and are left to stare at a bleak future.

Replying to a question in the Kerala Assembly on 5 October, 2016 Tribal Welfare Minister A K Balan informed that the state has 1070 unwed tribal mothers. In February, the number was 1051. The number of real victims would be much higher, and activists vouch that the number of victims would be way above 2,000. In 2002, the official statistics of unwed tribal mothers were 400” (Team Asianet Newsable, 2016).

Distribution of Unwed tribal mothers in Kerala October 2016:

Most affected areas:

Wayanad	326
Kasargod	206
Attappadi	113
Kannur	72

All districts - 1070 (Source: *Team Asianet Newsable*, 2016)

The problem is particularly acute among the Paniya tribes of Wayanad district which has the largest tribal concentration in the state. Thirunelly Panchayat, which falls within the district, has a substantial proportion of unwed mothers.

In the Attappady Block of Palakkad district, which is a tribal hub, with the presence of three prominent tribal communities of Kerala, the Irula, the Muduga and the Kurumba, 800 cases of unwed mothers in 170 hamlets were identified in a survey conducted by the Inquiry Commission of the People’s Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) [*The Hindu*, Palakkad, 23/08/2000]. Similar instances were reported from tribal areas of Nilambur (Malappuram), Parippa (Kasargod), Vithura (Thiruvananthapuram), etc.

“Several initiatives were being taken from the part of Government of Kerala to tackle this issue. Officials of the Commissionerate of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Development, under the Social Justice Ministry, visited Wayanad in 1991 and prepared a list of 160 unwed mothers. The Kerala Government then launched an Rs 37 lakh rehabilitation package, under which tribal women could avail financial assistance to build

houses and undertake farming. But the scheme was fraught with problems and hardly a handful of the beneficiaries availed of the assistance” (Nair Meena, 2014).

Snehasparsham Project for Tribal Unwed Mothers

This is a project of the Social Justice Department of the Government of Kerala which was launched at Mananthavady, in Wayanad district by the then Minister for Health Smt. P. K. Sreemathy in June 2010. This project was implemented through the Kerala Social Security Mission coming under the Social Justice Department. This project was launched in Wayanad as it is the district with the largest number of tribal unwed mothers in the state. This project is being implemented as per a study report of the State Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Commission. Under this project, a monthly aid of Rs.300/- was given to unwed tribal mothers. Later the amount was raised to Rs. 1000/- In the first phase 226 tribal unwed mothers were the beneficiaries. Out of them 76 women were from the Thirunelly panchayath of Wayanad which has the highest number of unwed tribal mothers in the State.

“Unwed mothers have the special need for education, employment, health care especially reproductive and child health. Quite often they are neglected from the main stream of life. The percentage of abortion related hazards and death is high among teenage unwed mothers.

One curious fact that can be noted that, the women who are exploited never blame the person who caused their misery, largely due to their style of living. At a young age they long for love and care.

Many efforts and rehabilitation programs have been carried out by various departments and agencies to improve their condition, but their condition remains unchanged. It is in such a situation that Social Security Mission had taken up such an initiative with Government to help these exploited women where money doesn't get diverted but instead reaches the eligible person through electronic money order” (Official website of Kerala Social Security Mission).

Discrimination against Unwed Mothers

In many societies unwed mothers are targets of social and even legal discrimination. Their status is not considered as natural and they are treated as social deviants. Sometimes they are considered as sexual perverts neglecting the value systems and norms of the society. Such social discrimination makes the life of unwed mothers and their children further miserable as they are often deprived of the social security measures available in society.

“Legal discrimination against unmarried mothers exists in many countries. In some places unmarried mothers are denied legal recognition of their status as a parent. It is often difficult to legally establish the child's paternity, thus depriving the mother of any legal claim to assistance from the child's father.

Even more common is social ostracism of unmarried mothers. Because in most societies motherhood out of wedlock is seen as a threat to social structure, unwed mothers are viewed with distrust: they are rejecting the existing social hierarchy. Social discrimination may make it difficult for an unmarried mother to find employment, child care and housing. An unmarried mother is often obliged to raise her children alone, without the moral and financial support of the father. This increases her burden of responsibility, and, because of the demands on her time, contributes to her social exclusion. In extreme cases, social condemnation of unmarried motherhood may be so great that the murder of the unmarried mother by her brother or her father, in order to preserve the honour of the family, is condoned.

The problems faced by unmarried mothers affect millions of children since whatever contributes to the degradation of the position of unmarried mothers has an impact on their children, and on the well-being and future participation of those children in the development of society” (The Encyclopedia of World Problems & Human Potential).

Kerala Women's Commission and Unwed Mothers

The Kerala Women's Commission (KWC), was formed on 14-3-1996. The commission performs as a statutory body; it performs on all matters relating to women's problems. The commission inquires into the complaints of any unfair practice and takes on decisions. Then the commission will recommend to the government, what action to be taken in that matter. The investigations relating to the issue concerning women is carried out by the head of the investigation wing, Director of KWC.

The Commission is also responsible to improve the social status of women. The commission ensures to guarantee equal opportunity to women in the state public service and state public undertakings in the matter of promotions and recruitment and if necessary the commission report or recommend it to the government action (Official website of Kerala Women's Commission).

The Women's Commission has taken steps to support the tribal unwed mothers of Wayanad. "Worried over the increasing number of unwed young mothers in Wayanad, the Kerala Women's Commission has asked the state government to set up a DNA centre to prove the fatherhood of illegitimate children in this predominantly tribal district. A two-day fact-finding mission by KWC members in the hilly areas of Mananthavady, Pulpally and Sultan Battery in the district has startled the authorities. Some 170 unmarried tribal girls with one or more children came to the Commission, pleading that they do not know who the fathers of their offspring are. The Commission has asked the government to immediately set up a DNA testing unit in Wayanad.

"I am a daily wage earner in the paddy fields. The men (*landlords*) tempted me to their houses. But I became pregnant before I knew that I was sexually being exploited by them," 18-year old Pallavi told the KCW. "I want to marry my daughter's father. But I do not know who he is," she said. Many other tribal girls like Pallavi now want their alleged perpetrators either to marry them or to pay them hefty compensation to bring up their children. The KWC has offered to help these unwed mothers. To begin with, it has asked

the Wayanad district collector to conduct DNA tests on 70 children whose mothers have named their alleged exploiters.

Forced by the ills that afflict Wyanad's tribals, the KWC has decided to set up exclusive family council centres in the tribal pockets of the district. The family council teachers will work among the tribals, educating them to resist the sexual exploitation from the rich landlords. The family councils will teach the tribals that marriage is a legal necessity before entering into any sexual contacts and marriages have to be registered in their respective panchayats” (Iype, 2000).

National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)

It is an Indian constitutional body established through Constitution (89th Amendment) Act, 2003. The first Commission was established in 2004.

The following are the functions of the commission:

- To investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution or under any other law for the time being in force or under any order of the Government and to evaluate the working of such safeguards;
- To inquire into specific complaints with respect to the deprivation of rights and safeguards of the Scheduled Tribes;
- To participate and advise in the planning process of socio-economic development of the Scheduled Tribes and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and any State;
- To present to the President, annually and at such other times as the Commission may deem fit, reports upon the working of those safeguards;
- To make in such reports, recommendations as to the measures that should be taken by the Union or any State for effective implementation of those safeguards and other measures for the protection, welfare and socio-economic development of the Scheduled Tribes, and

- To discharge such other functions in relation to the protection, welfare and development and advancement of the Scheduled Tribes as the President may, subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament, by rule specify. (Official website of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes)

Kerala State SC/ST Commission

The former Harijan Welfare Department was bifurcated and the Tribal Welfare Department was formed exclusively to look after the matters connected with tribals as per G.O. (P) No. 69/75/DD dated 21-06-1975. Later the Harijan Welfare Department and the Tribal Welfare Department was renamed as Scheduled Castes Development Department and Scheduled Tribes Development Department respectively.

The Duties and the Functions of the Commission

- a. To enquire about the complaints regarding the violation of the rights, rules and protective measures for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes guaranteed in the constitution and to bring the matter before the concerned higher authority.
- b. To participate in the planning process of economic and social development activities for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and to give advice and to review the development progress of these category.
- c. To give reports/recommendations regarding the measures to be taken by State Government for the effective implementation of the law and protective measures, welfare economic and social developmental activities annually or wherever the commission consider it necessary to give the same.
- d. To perform any other duties for the protection, welfare and development of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes.

If any of the above mentioned duties are performed by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, which is constituted as per the article 338;

the State Commission for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes will not have the right to do such things. (Official website of Kerala State SC/ST Commission)

Scheduled Tribes in Kerala

As per the data available from the population census conducted in 2011 total Scheduled Tribe population in the state is 4,84,839. Out of these 4,33,092 live in rural areas and 51,747 live in urban areas. The proportion of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala is 1.45 percent of the total population. The proportion during the last census (2001) was 1.14 percent. Thus there has been an increase of 0.36 percent in the proportion during the last one decade. The highest proportion of Scheduled Tribes is found in Wayanad district (18.53%) and the lowest in Thrissur district (0.30%). The Scheduled Tribe population in absolute numbers has increased by 1,20,650 from the last census. The highest number of Scheduled Tribe population has been recorded in Wayanad district (1,51,443) and the lowest number in Alapuzha district (6,574). In terms of gender composition there are 2,38,203 male Scheduled Tribes and 2,46,636 females. The sex ratio of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala is 1035.

It is worthwhile mentioning that the list of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala had undergone changes during the decade 2001-2011 resulting in change in proportion of Scheduled Tribes. (Scheduled Tribe population Census - 2011)

Pathetic condition of Tribes in Kerala

As per a survey conducted by Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), as much as 49 percent of the tribal houses in Kerala state do not have toilets, 24,289 families do not hold ration cards, hundreds of graduates and undergraduates among tribal's are jobless and half of the population of Scheduled Tribes is deprived of pure drinking water. The survey started in 2008 and was completed in October 2011. The Survey was conducted in association with local bodies in the State and the Scheduled Tribe Welfare

Department. The statistics reveal the pathetic condition of the Scheduled Tribes in the state.

There are 4,614 landless tribal families in the State. More than 55 percent of tribal's live in dilapidated houses and do not have kitchens. As many as 1,252 tribal hamlets are not electrified. More than 1300 tribal settlements face threat from wild animals. Of the 40,1401-strong tribal population, 'Paniyan' community is the largest. The total population of the five primitive tribal groups – Koraga, Kattunayakan, Cholanaikan, Kurumba and Kadar – is 26,273.

There are 36,135 Adivasi families in Wayanad as per the study report (Wayanad district report, part I), in which, 1986 (5.45%) families are still landless, 7001 (19.37%) families are having below 5 cents land and 7817 (21.63%) families are having only up to 5.9 cents of land. Only 6513 (18.02%) tribal families own more than one acre land in Wayanad. It clearly shows the pathetic scenario of land alienation and landlessness of tribals which aggravated indescribable distress in their lives.

There are 887 unwed mothers and 20,301 widows among Scheduled Tribe women. Only 17 percent of them get pension. Many families do not have access to medical care. There are 4,036 differently-abled and 2386 are mentally challenged. 40,323 are suffering chronic diseases.

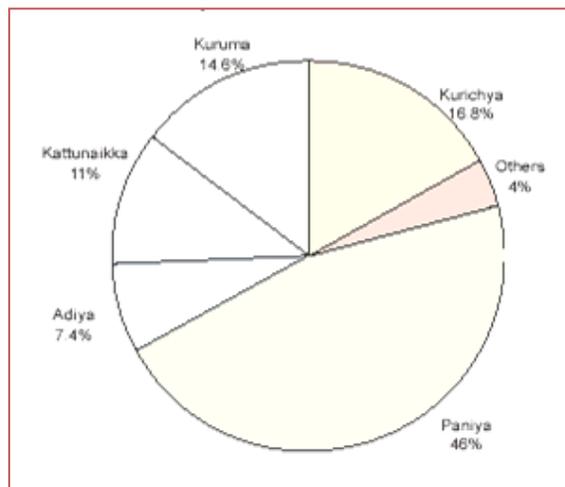
The literacy rate among Scheduled Tribes is 72.77 percent in this state that boasts of 96 percent literacy rate. Most of them drop out of schools at primary level. 77,680 people in the age group of 15-59 are unemployed. These include 2112 graduates, 200 postgraduates, and 2066 people with professional qualifications. (The Hindu, 2011)

According to media reports of 2013 till then no action was taken on the study report prepared by a government agency, the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) and submitted to the state government in 2011. Even though a lady from the tribal community of Wayanad district was the minister for tribal

welfare at that time there was no benefit given to the tribes based on the recommendations of the study. This is an indication of the laxity on the part of the authorities to ensure the welfare and security of the scheduled tribes (Sudhakaran, 2013). This happens in spite of constitutional safeguards provided to the Scheduled Tribes for ensuring their well being. This

Tribes of Wayanad District

Wayanad is the home of many tribal communities. This district stood first in the state in terms of concentration of tribal population. While they were the original inhabitants of the area, the coming of the British led to them moving to their current settlements. This process of migration intensified in 1940s and 1950s when large number of non-tribal agriculturalists from the erstwhile Travancore region migrated to high ranges in search of fertile agricultural land. The state government also encouraged farmers to clear and cultivate in the forest region as part of the initiative known as *Grow More Food*. As there was serious shortage of food materials in the post Independence period government gave freedom to the cultivators to raise food crops in the forest region also. This migration resulted in the displacement of native tribes. In course of time the tribes became minority in the district. As they lost their original habitat they faced serious socio-cultural problems.



Division of Tribal population of Wayanad district

The tribal population of the district comprises of various communities like Paniyar, Kurumar, Adiyar, Kurichyar, Oorali, Kattunaikkan and Uraali Kuruman. Each one of them has their own unique culture and at the same time they share many common characteristics.

Paniyan Tribe

Paniyan is the numerically largest tribal community in Kerala. They mainly live in Wayanad district and in the neighboring districts of Kannur and Malappuram. Paniyas were bond labourers in the past. They were once sold along with plantations by the landlords. But after Independence the government abolished the system of bonded labor and now they live mainly as agricultural laborers in the plantations as well as in the land of the big landlords. The etymological meaning of the term 'Paniyan' is 'worker' as they were supposed to engage in manual labor in the fields of non tribes. In the past the Paniyas used to engage in paddy cultivation in their own land inside deep forests. But now they are transferred from such natural hamlets inside the forests to settlements provided by the government in the fringe areas of forests. Therefore they possess only very small pieces of land and just remain as agricultural laborers.

Monogamy is the general principle of marriage among the Paniyas. In marriage bride price is practiced like many other tribal communities. Widow re-marriage is permitted by the customary law. A girl or boy is ready to get married when they enter puberty. Commencement of the monthly period is the indication for a girl that she is now ready to get married. Therefore, they have some lifecycle rituals associated with the starting of menstruation for a girl. On the other hand they have no idea regarding the minimum age of marriage for a boy and a girl fixed by the marriage legislations of the government.

They have their own religious ideas and deities which are different from the deities of the popular Hinduism. But now due to the influence of contact with the non-tribal Hindus they visit the Hindu temples and worship those deities. They also have reverence to some of the trees and animals found in the forest. Due to the various tribal welfare programmes

of the government, and also due to the intense interaction with the non tribal settlers, Paniyas have lost most of the elements of their traditional culture.

Background of the Study

Tribal culture is in a cross road today and the problems they face are complicated. As the tribal culture lost its primitive nature, and as they are intermingling with the mainstream culture, new issues arise in their life which were unheard of in the past. One such prominent issue is the problems faced by the Unwed Mothers of the tribal communities.

In the Attappady block of Palakkad district, which is a tribal hub, with the presence of three prominent tribal communities of Kerala, the Irula, the Muduga and the Kurumba, 800 cases of Unwed Mothers in 170 hamlets were identified in a survey conducted by the Inquiry Commission of the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) [The Hindu, 23/08/2000]. Similar instances were reported from tribal areas of Nilambur (Malappuram), Parippa (Kasargod), Vithura (Thiruvananthapuram), etc.

There are a total of 392 Tribal Unwed Mothers reported from Wayanad. In this, four are below 17 years of age and 26 are in the age group 18-21. 46.17% of the total number of Single Mothers of the district is from the Paniya tribal community [Study report of Scheduled Tribes Development Department and Local Administration Department, 2008].

Several initiatives were being taken from the part of Government of Kerala to tackle this issue. Officials of the Commissionerate of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Development, under the Ministry of Social Justice, visited Wayanad in 1991 and prepared a list of 160 unwed mothers. The Kerala Government then launched Rs 37 lakh rehabilitation package, under which tribal Unwed Mothers could avail financial assistance to build houses and undertake farming. But the scheme was fraught with problems and hardly a handful of the beneficiaries availed of this assistance.

“The largest number of unwed mothers belonging to ST communities lives in Waynad district. It is estimated that there are nearly 400 unwed mothers living in pathetic

conditions. Many of them do not have proper living conditions like house, sanitation, health care etc. Many of them are facing exploitations from outside resulting in hunger, poverty, illiteracy, high dropout rate among school going children and weak empowerment of women etc. In spite of sincere efforts by various departments and agencies, their condition remains unchanged. It is therefore necessary to address their problems in a time bound manner”. (Social Security Mission, Government of Kerala).

Thirunelly Panchayat of Wayanad is home to over a 100 tribal unwed mothers- many victims of sexual exploitation, some as young as 11 years, struggling to survive along with their children.

Age and Number of tribal unwed mothers of Wayanad District

Sl No	Age Group	Number
1	15-17	4
2	18-21	26
3	22-29	100
4	30-44	189
5	45-59	55
6	60 and above	18
	Total	392

STDD, LSG, District Report- Wayanad, 2008

The above table emphasizes the gravity of the issue and hence this study focuses on the socio economic situation of Paniya unwed mothers, taking into consideration their cultural and psychological contexts. The study mainly deals with the Paniya unwed mothers living in the Thirunelly Panchayat.

This is the problem area where the study is placed. This study examined the various causes of backwardness which leads to the increased number of unwed mothers in the Paniya tribal community of Wayanad district, looking into the gendered aspects of the same, health problems and the impact of governmental interventions.

Significance of the Study

Tribal population forms one among the most marginalized communities in Kerala. Owing to their specific characteristics and geographical settings they remain inaccessible to outside population. As such many social issues which arise among them as alcohol consumption, child marriage, and school drop outs etc are left unattended by the mainstream population. This is aggravated by the fact that many Government programmes designed and implemented for them are neither much beneficial to them nor are they reaching the target population.

As anywhere else it is the women population of any community faces the gravest of social issues. So is the case of Tribal community. This study made an attempt to throw light on one such grave issue - The unwed mothers of Paniya Tribes of Kerala. The Problems of Unwed Mothers are linked with various socio-economic and cultural variables. In Kerala, this problem is coupled with the ignorance and the consequent exploitation of the tribes. Often they lack a perspective of their problem. The problem is particularly acute among the Paniya tribes of Wayanad district. Thirunelly Panchayat, which falls within the district, has a substantial number of unwed mothers. More than being women herein their conditions is even worsened owing to the fact that they have to face social stigma related to their situation. This point to the significance of this study. It has in it an element of responsibility of the wider population as well as the social science community towards unraveling and addressing such issues which has human rights issues as well. The findings of this study can be used by the planners and administrators in the field of tribal development, in the government and voluntary sector, for evolving and implementing programmes for the welfare of the tribal unwed mothers.

Conclusion

Nowadays all facets of tribal life are changing due to the close contact with the non-tribal society. The general socio-political atmosphere prevailing in the country is accelerating this process. Government follows a policy of protective discrimination towards tribes so that development programmes are implemented for bringing them in the mainstream society.

Tribes in Kerala need a humane treatment from the part of the non tribal society and the State Government. In spite of the sincere efforts made by the Government, many of their problems are still persisting. The government officials should develop an empathetic feeling towards the tribes. Our first Prime Minister, Shri. Jawaharlal Nehru emphasized this point in the 1950s itself. While sending government officials to North Eastern states to take care of tribal welfare, he opined that these officials should learn tribal dialects, follow their food habits and be ready to smoke with them or dance with them. Nehru was emphasizing the need to officials regarding internalizing tribal culture so that they can get their confidence and trust. Then only tribes will cooperate with them when development programmes are implemented.

Now many government agencies are functioning for the welfare of the tribes. Each institution is initiating projects for tribal welfare. Often there is duplication and overlapping in the activities of the various agencies. Therefore a better coordination among these agencies would have been beneficial in order to attain the targets of these projects. Much wastage of money and other resources could have been reduced. One possibility is to integrate the tribal welfare programmes of State Government agencies with the Panchayati Raj institutions, as in the case of many other sectors.

Media play a major role in highlighting the problems in the tribal hamlets. Today, both the print and the visual media expose the problems in the tribal areas. Often this is helpful for the government agencies to take ameliorative steps in this regard. Moreover, media can also present the uniqueness of tribal culture, their way of life, festivals, art forms,

food habits etc. This can be helpful for the mainstream society to develop a better awareness on them. The wrong image in the mind of outsiders can be rectified through such programmes.

A democracy works when all citizens including the most marginalized people like tribes have the capability to ask questions, seek accountability from the state and participate in the process of governance. *Anthyodaya* or unto the last should be the philosophy behind distribution of resources by the government. Voices of the most vulnerable should be heard in decision making. The present study is an attempt to highlight the grave issues of one of the most marginalized and discriminated sections of our society that is the tribal unwed mothers.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Researcher has carried out a review of the available literature on tribal communities of Kerala in general and that of the unwed mothers in particular.

There has been not much research on the topic of unwed motherhood in the context of Kerala. Available published materials on unwed mothers in the non-tribal communities are many and mostly of foreign origin. They elaborate the causes of this phenomenon and the consequences experienced by the unwed mothers themselves and the society to which they belong. However, the socio-cultural context of the unwed mothers in the non-tribal communities is much different from that of their counterparts in the tribal communities. Even in the non-tribal communities the problems experienced by the unwed mothers in rural and urban communities are much different.

The problem of unwed motherhood can be treated as a problem at different levels. Primarily it is a problem at the personal, familial and societal levels. At the personal level the whole problem starts with a premarital sexual relation happening between a man and woman. On most of the occasions the women expect that this relation between them will lead to marriage and the formation of the family, so that the child will be safe and protected and get social acceptance. However, the male partner may not be that much concerned about the marriage with his partner and usually give more importance to the pleasure of sex life. Moreover, both parties may not expect that their relation will lead to pregnancy so soon. In many instances the male partners evade from their responsibilities when they know that the woman is pregnant. Then only the woman will realize that she is left alone to face the consequences of what has happened. She is solely responsible to look after the child. In such circumstances some women opt for medical termination of pregnancy in order to escape from the social stigma. Others who do not want to destroy the foetus give birth to the child and take care of it. But later such women struggle a lot if

they do not have a steady income. Their most serious problem will be that of livelihood in addition to the issue of social stigma. If at all the woman had some job she will remain invalid for a few months before and after delivery.

The family comes in the picture when it is known that the woman is pregnant by observing her bodily changes. Always it is a shock for the family as unwed motherhood is not socially accepted. So, such a woman is always a target of social stigma. Some family members will attempt to persuade the woman to go for an abortion to suppress the problem from others. In many other situations the family members allow the woman to deliver the child and take care of it. Invariably the woman has to face the negative reactions from the members of the family. Often the parents, out of their love and affection towards their daughter, support her in such difficult times. But all the women may not be that much fortunate as the parents may not be alive or they may not accept their daughter. In poor families the parents and siblings will not be in a situation to support the unwed mother as they themselves will be struggling to make both ends meet. Anyway the support of the family is crucial especially at the later stages of pregnancy and for a few months after delivery. The woman needs support in such periods as she may not be physically fit in order to take care of herself and the newborn baby.

The society is immediately represented by the people in the neighborhood, relatives and others with whom the woman and her family members have direct and intimate contact. It may include the friends and colleagues of the woman and her family members. When they realize the problem of unwed motherhood their immediate reaction would be that of non-acceptance and rejection. They will consider that the woman committed a mistake which they cannot approve. They may ridicule and isolate her from their groups. Sometimes she may lose her job if she is working and may be forced to drop out from school or college if she is a student. She may be forced to avoid many social and religious functions due to the disapproval of the fellow members. On the other hand a minority of her friends and colleagues may come forward to support her in this period of crisis.

The migration of farming communities from the erstwhile Travancore state during the 1950s to early 1970s for agricultural land has resulted in increased congregation of non tribal migrant tribal farming population in the tribal heartland of Wayanad. This has resulted in long term impact on socio economic, political and cultural life of tribes in the district (Jose, 2011)

G. Prabhakaran in his article published in *The Hindu* news paper described the exploitations suffered by the tribal women living in the Attappady region of Palakkad district. “The Anti-Human Trafficking Cell with the intervention of the police department registered 21 cases of rape against tribal women in this region. The issue of unwed mothers in tribal hamlets in Attappady has been reported in the media over the last many years. However, it had been swept under the carpet by successive governments. Now the number of ‘unwed child mothers’ too is on the rise. There are reports of schoolgirls living in the government hostels becoming mothers and ending up in sex trade.

The shocking revelations about ‘unwed mothers’ was reported in 2000 in a survey conducted in 174 tribal hamlets in Attappady by a voluntary organization ‘NAMU’. It identified 343 ‘unwed mothers’ among the tribes. The survey found that some of the unwed mothers had more than one child. Majority of them were comparatively young, in the age group of 16 to 25. The survey found that the men exploited and later deserted the women. This forced some to take to prostitution; some even became drug addicts, the survey said” (2011).

According to P.R.G.Mathur, well known anthropologist the problem of unwed mothers in Attappady started with the migration of settlers to Attappady in search of land and forest wealth 30 to 40 years ago. The issue is as serious as tribal land alienation where the tribes of Attappady lost nearly 11,000 acres of land. But no steps were taken to restore their land by the successive governments (Prabhakaran, 2011).

The non tribal settlers occupy and destroy their culture. They leave their families and live with tribal women. After some time, they desert them. This is the normal course of action in the case of most of the victims. Abuses and atrocities on the tribal women are on the rise due to the absence of strong action against the culprits.

Sometimes the non tribal outsiders offer money to the tribal men and hire them as labourers for illegal activities inside the forest like cutting of timber and cultivation of ganja (*Cannabis sativa*). After developing familiarity and friendship with the tribal men the outsiders gradually use the tribal hamlets into their hideouts, making tribal women easy prey.

Due to their negative experiences leaders of some tribal settlements prohibit the entry of non tribes inside the tribal hamlets. They also feel that violators of tribal rights are not punished and police and government officials are supporting them after receiving bribe from them.

The direct results of the migration were large scale occupation of tribal habitats and forest lands by non tribal migrant population. On the other side, tribes were increasingly displaced and were denied land and resources. Tribes who have hitherto developed the modern sense of ownership of land and resources could not maintain their ancestral lands and properties. The forest laws have further deprived the tribes of their livelihood in Wayanad as in other places as these enactments have considerably restricted access to forest resources (Aerthayil, 2008).

As a result, the tribes largely constitute the manual laborers working for the agricultural and allied activities of non farming communities in Wayanad. This close cooperation in the economic and social realm of daily life has resulted in increased social exchange, social engagement and social interaction between the tribal and non tribal rural communities. But such social exchange, social engagement and social interaction between the tribes and non tribes were not on an equitable basis. In this scenario, the

tribes were always at a disadvantage where as the non tribes who controlled the land and resources reaped advantages (Jose, 2011).

The context of social interaction and exchange, expose tribal women and girls to high risk sexual exploitation by non tribal men. Social interaction and exchange controlled by dominant non tribal social groups in Wayanad, such as work place, residence and schools made tribal girls and women, the most vulnerable objects of undue sexual advancement and exploitation. This inequitable social interaction and exchange determined by dominant social groups have resulted in many forms of residual disabilities in the socio economic, political and cultural life of the tribes in Wayanad.

From the gender dimension, the existing literature reports that women in most tribal societies in Kerala, especially in Wayanad, had enjoyed equal status with men and were the cornerstone of the social structure of tribal societies in Kerala (Mathur, 1996).

Usually motherhood invites glorification, but the experience of an unwed mother is the opposite. The stigma attached to unwed motherhood is very strong in the general society. Women are maltreated in many ways. Gender inequality remained extremely acute and appalling in all levels of society as in literacy, education, health, sexual harassment and exploitation.

The tribal context was different due to the difference in the tribal culture, but, at present, due to mingling with the mainstream population, the value systems of the tribes have changed. Hence, the experience of tribal unwed mothers is not as they were in the past. The tribe as a whole has lost the cohesiveness that binds them together; also they have lost the flexibility regarding the institution of marriage. All this has contributed to the mounting problems of unwed motherhood.

Number of Single mothers in all districts of Kerala

Sl No	District	Number of tribal single mothers	Number of tribal women in the district	% of single mothers to the total
1	Thiruvananthapuram	62	5765	0.03
2	Kollam	29	2321	0.014
3	Pathananthitta	18	3044	0.009
4	Alappuzha	0	1527	0
5	Kottayam	12	5496	0.006
6	Idukki	43	19498	0.021
7	Ernakulam	15	4073	0.007
8	Thrissur	15	2859	0.007
9	Palakkad	106	23494	0.053
10	Malappuram	19	7436	0.009
11	Kozhikode	43	5357	0.021
12	Wayanad	302	77466	0.15
13	Kannur	72	19173	0.036
14	Kasargode	199	24225	0.099
	Total	935	2,01,734	0.463

Source : Unpublished Report on the context of Tribal Single Mothers in Kerala, KIRTADS, 2013.

A study was conducted by Mandal (1982) during 1976-1978 to examine the problems, socioeconomic status, educational background, and motivation for resorting to premarital sex of 100 unmarried women who reported to three large government hospitals to undergo a legal abortion. The author found out that primarily the respondents opted for Medical Termination of Pregnancy as they were afraid of the social stigma against them.

This study conducted by Mathur (2009) elaborates the social and cultural stigma experienced by the unwed mothers from their relatives, co-workers, neighbours etc. The paper also suggests that unmarried girls need to take some precautions when they closely interact with persons belonging to the opposite sex.

The article by an anonymous author entitled *Discrimination against Unmarried Mothers* elaborates the various problems faced by single mothers in different countries. According to the author the discrimination has multitude of facets like, denial of legal recognition of their status as a parent, social exclusion and in extreme cases, social condemnation of unmarried motherhood may be so great that the murder of the unmarried mother by her brother or her father, in order to preserve the honour of the family, is condoned (The Encyclopedia of World Problems & Human Potential).

This paper published in the internet elaborates the causes and consequences of unwed motherhood. It is also explained how this problem can be prevented by the unmarried girls. The author pointed out that it is very difficult for the unwed mothers to get back to normal life after affected by this problem (Kaur, 2015).

This article deals with the problems of unwed mothers with a special focus on the practice of abandoning the small babies by their mothers. The author points that there are many reasons for such a behavior of unwed mothers and humane approach is to be adopted in solving their problems. He also emphasizes the need for sex education in the school level (Anonymous, 2015).

This paper written by Brown (2013) investigates the psychological problems faced by the unwed mothers. The author points out that the traumatic experiences of many of the unwed mothers poses hurdles for them in making use of their life opportunities and some discontinue their education and the career advancement opportunities of some of them are adversely affected. The study highlights the need of counseling for unwed mothers to overcome this crisis in life.

The report appeared in this publication exposes how the situation exist in the hostels for the tribal girl students run by the Kerala Tribal Welfare Department contributes towards

their sexual exploitation. The author reveals that the hostels, part of the Integrated Tribal Development Project, have seen two inmates deliver children while another three are reportedly in various stages of pregnancy. Even though the sexual offence against a tribal girl is non-bailable the police officials often support the culprits and deny justice to the victims (Jose, 2000).

Iype (2000) published a report in an online publication about the role played by Kerala Women's Commission for supporting the tribal unwed mothers of Wayanad. Worried over the increasing number of unwed young mothers in Wayanad, the Commission has asked the state government to set up a DNA centre to prove the fatherhood of illegitimate children in this predominantly tribal district.

The literature review shows that most of the studies on the tribal unwed mothers expose the different problems faced by them. Many of them are conducted either by the media personnel or administrators. There is a dearth of anthropological and sociological studies which can fetch a better picture of the situation of the tribal unwed mothers by delineating the social and cultural factors playing a role in this situation. There are many lacunae in the available literature. The present study has been made to fill such research gaps and bring out a comprehensive picture of the situation of tribal unwed mothers.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

The present research on the tribal unwed mothers has been carried out following qualitative research logic. In the present chapter details of the research methodology are explained. This is helpful for other researchers to understand the validity and reliability of this investigation. If anybody wants to replicate this study they can do that by familiarizing with the methodology followed here.

General Research Question:

What are the socio economic challenges experienced by the unwed mothers of the Paniya tribal community, emphasizing Paniya life pattern, culling out their health issues, documenting the experiences of government interventions and identifying possible ways to alleviate the problems of the Paniya unwed mothers?

Specific Research Questions:

1. What is the current life situation of Paniya unwed mothers in the backdrop of their day to day activities?
2. What is the world view of Paniya unwed mothers?
3. What are the cultural conflicts faced by Paniya unwed mothers in their current life situations?
4. What are the major health issues of Paniya unwed mothers?
5. What extent has the *Snehasparsham* project empowered the social life of Paniya unwed mothers?
6. What extent to which the external interventions empowered Paniya unwed mothers in terms of earning an income and coping with their monetary survival requirements?

In the light of the above research questions the researcher critically examined the

concept of tribal development as it is practiced today in the background of the experience of Paniya unwed mothers.

Research Design:

Case study design is adopted in this study. That is the research looks at the depth of the problem than its breadth. Focusing on the subjects' own experiences and point of view this study aims to bring about a vivid picture of their life experience and the way they approach and handle it. Primarily an interpretive approach was adopted for this study by giving utmost importance to the subjects of study and the researcher looked at the social realities by sharing their perspective.

Techniques of Research:

Qualitative research techniques were utilized by the investigator considering the nature of the research problem. The problem dealt here is very sensitive and not amenable to a quantitative research strategy. Female field investigators were appointed for collecting primary data after giving them sufficient inputs on the aim and methods of this study. Identifying the subjects of study was very difficult as the status of an unwed mother carries social stigma. The *Anganwadi* workers, ASHA workers and tribal promoters of a locality assisted the researcher to identify the prospective subjects. However, some of the subjects were not willing to open up about their experiences. Only with much effort and persuasion the subjects were ready to provide the data necessary for the researcher.

The leaders of the community were also not interested to admit the presence of unwed mothers in their place. They consider that already there is much publicity in the media about the issue of unwed mothers that tarnished the image of tribes. Besides the victims did not get any benefit from such studies and media investigations. Even officials of the state government collected information of the unwed mothers without any follow up to protect their interests. As a cumulative effect of all these they have a cynical approach towards this issue and do not want even to talk about it.

Field Setting:

The study is based on unwed mothers of Paniya tribal Community. This particular tribal community is located in Wayanad District of Kerala. Primary data for the present study was gathered from the various Paniyan settlements located in the Thirunelly panchayat where this problem is reported to be most rampant. Hence the setting of this study is Wayanad District. The subjects were interviewed by visiting their households and after establishing initial rapport the in-depth interviews were carried out as per their convenience.

Concept:**Unwed Mother**

In this study the term unwed mother is used to refer to a woman who has given birth to a child or children, but not married at the time of delivery of child, that is a woman who happened to give birth to children outside the institution of marriage. It includes those unmarried women who are mothers and have children through a relation which is neither morally acceptable to their society nor legally approved by the state. It includes women who have undergone sexual assault, or have indulged in illicit sexual relation. Such women after giving birth to a child or children and subsequently got married also were treated as unwed mother for the purpose of this study. Thus the present marital status of the subject was not the criterion for selecting them for this study but rather their marital status while giving birth to their child or children.

“Unwed mother is the lady who has become pregnant without legal justification of physical intimacy between man and women. In the traditional societies like India the physical relationship before marriage or becoming mother before marriage is considered as a sin. Therefore the result of such women in the traditional societies is very bad” (<https://www.scribd.com/doc/48857405/unwed-mother>).

Selection of subjects:

There are a total of 392 tribal unwed mothers reported from Wayanad according to official statistics. 46.17% of the total number of unwed mothers of the district is from the

Paniya tribal community [Study report of Scheduled Tribes Development Department and Local Administration Department, 2008].

The present study pertains only to the unwed mothers belonging to the Paniya tribal community. Since the study is a qualitative one based on case study design, the participants were selected from among them purposively by the researcher depending on the availability, approachability and criteria set by the researcher.

Tools of data collection:

Researcher made use of both primary and secondary data including the policy documents, previous study reports, narratives of persons who are knowledgeable about this issue, besides the narratives of Paniya unwed mothers on their experience. The study obtained insights from reflexive social science methodology including case study, observation and interview guide as tools of data collection.

Data analysis and interpretation:

Being a qualitative study no statistical tools were used for this research. The primary data gathered from the field was analyzed in the backdrop of the available literature in this area of research. The observations and field experiences were also helpful in the analysis and interpretation of data.

Limitations:

Even though the total number of unwed mothers is available from the official sources it is doubtful how far it is realistic as there are always attempts to hide this problem mainly because of the social stigma attached to it. Moreover, the victims are also not optimistic that they will get some benefit from the authorities if at all they disclose what has happened to them. So, many of them prefer to remain quiet rather than reporting it to anybody.

Considering the sensitive nature of the problem of study; the researcher found it difficult to get sufficient response from the subjects. However the qualitative techniques being made use of were helpful to develop rapport with them and many other data were gathered by observation.

Being a qualitative study, only a theoretical generalization could be made. However, the qualitative data analysis was helpful to understand the intricate nature of the research problem under study.

Chapter Four

Case Studies

Introduction

For the present study 15 unwed mothers belonging to the Paniya tribal community were selected as the subjects for collecting primary data. All of them live in the different tribal settlements at different localities of Wayanad district of Kerala state. Care was taken to identify the subjects living in different tribal hamlets and also with varying circumstances. Real names of the subjects are avoided for honouring their privacy. Most of the subjects were identified with the help of tribal promoters, *Anganwadi* workers and ASHA workers who have good contact and rapport with the local people. The researcher also ensured their assistance while conducting the in-depth interviews. Their presence gave confidence to the subjects while explaining their experiences. The interviews were conducted mainly by the female field investigators appointed by the researcher mainly because of the sensitive nature of the research problem under study. Some of the subjects became emotional while describing the bitter experiences of the past. Presence of other women gave some relief to the subjects.

Description of each case was organized under the following sub headings: circumstances leading to unwed motherhood, financial conditions, health issues, and cultural conflicts. These are the thrust areas of the problem under study.

Case 1

Suma is a 26 year old woman of Paniya tribal community living in the Edayurkundu Kokandam settlement of Thirunelly Panchayth in Wayanad district. She belongs to a nuclear family. She studied up to eighth standard and now living as an agricultural labourer in her village. Her father is no more and mother is alive. She has one sister and no brothers. She has two sons and is the main breadwinner of the family.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

She had a love affair with a person from outside the state and in that relation she had a son. That man came to her village in search of employment and engaged in manual

labour in her locality. They had a chance of working together in a place and gradually they got attracted to each other. He promised to marry her and then will take her to his place. Then they had sexual relations between them which resulted in pregnancy. But after she got pregnant he gradually moved away from her and finally left the village. He was not ready to take responsibility of Suma and the child. Her mother and elder sister supported her during her pregnancy and later.

When Suma was a small child her father abandoned her mother and she alone was responsible for upbringing the children. Suma gave birth to her first child at the age of 16 years. After a few years she got married to a person belonging to the Paniya community in her locality. As she was a good-looking fair woman many young men were approaching her for illicit relation. That is why she opted for marriage in order to protect herself from such unscrupulous elements. She only found out the bridegroom and arranged this marriage with the consent of her mother. She had a second son in this marriage and she gave birth to the child in 2017. The elder son is studying in the 5th standard in a local school. He has no relation with the present husband of Suma. He is taken care of by the mother of Suma. Now Suma has no contact with the man who is the father of her elder son.

Financial conditions

Suma is a manual labourer in the agricultural sector. She gets Rs. 250/- as daily wage and get three or four days of work in a week. Being the bread winner of the family, she is struggling to make both ends meet. Her husband is also a manual labourer and gets work occasionally. The family is in trouble when she has no work. They do not have any savings and also borrowed money from many neighbours. Under the EMS Housing Project of Government of Kerala she got four cents of land and a house. She has much financial difficulty and occasionally receives assistance from the Tribal Development Department.

Health problems

Even though Suma delivered her first child at the age of 16 years she has no specific health problems. She never had any miscarriages. Both of her deliveries were in the local

government hospital and both of her sons got immunisation. Now as she has an infant she needs to go to hospital occasionally. Generally she prefers to go to government hospital as she need not pay money for treatment.

She is satisfied by the care obtained from her mother and hospital during her pregnancy and after delivery. Mother assisted her in taking care of the new born baby. Being a girl in her teen age Suma was not able to take care of the infant by herself alone. There are no medical facilities close to her home and she had to go to the nearby town to visit a doctor. It was difficult for her as she had to walk a long distance carrying her child. There are no good roads closer to her hamlet and so it was difficult to get vehicles for conveyance.

The nearby Primary Health Centre (PHC) is a great support for her as she often gets medicines and immunisation from there. She has no need and capacity to visit hospitals far away from her village. Even though she became a mother at a tender age, it did not affect her capacity to engage in hard work. She did not receive any assistance either from the tribal promoters or ASHA workers during pregnancy and child birth.

Cultural conflicts

Her community did not approve her status as an unwed mother. She herself was ashamed of being an unwed mother and many in her community ridiculed and blamed her. There were no customary rituals performed when Suma was pregnant as she was pregnant out of an illicit relation. Family members and close relatives were also upset regarding what happened to Suma. Anyway she was not ousted from the family as her mother supported her. In turn, her mother also had to suffer ridicule from the members of the community. After the birth of the son all life-cycle rituals were performed for him in order to get the blessings of the supernatural forces. Suma strongly believes in god and feel that providential assistance is essential for leading a secure life in this cruel world.

Suma aspires for improvement in her living conditions. She needs a better house, safe drinking water, good road and such other infrastructural facilities. What is more important for her is to get regular employment so that she can take care of her children and herself.

She is not aware of the *Snehasparsham* project of Government of Kerala for supporting the unwed mothers. She does not know whether tribal unwed mothers, especially Paniya women get any support from the government. She also did not receive any support from any NGOs or any religious organizations.

Case 2

Ramani is a 37 year old Paniya unwed mother living in the Kokandan tribal settlement. She is a dropout of the 9th standard in a local school. Both her parents are no more. She had only one sister who also died and no brothers. She belonged to a nuclear family and now lives alone with her six year old son. She supports herself and the child from the wage obtained as a manual labourer.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Ramani's parents failed to arrange her marriage at the right time. Generally in her community the parents arrange marriage of their daughters even before the age of 20 years. But her father passed away when she was a school student followed by the death of her sister. Then the mother alone was unable to arrange the marriage of Ramani. Therefore she remained as single and after the death of her mother lived with the maternal aunt. After she crossed the age of 30 years she got attached to a man who was younger to her in age. This person was a manual labourer belonging to her own community. She had occasional sexual intercourse with this person. But she never expected that this will lead to pregnancy. Finally she got pregnant and later she stopped all contacts with this man. She delivered a male child in the local government hospital. She had no miscarriages earlier or later. Her son got immunisation from the hospital. She was not aware of the biological connection between sexual intercourse and pregnancy. She admits that this was not a love affair and a sort of infatuation. She had no serious complaints against him as he never promised to marry her. Ramani does not want to continue that relation anymore in future. Now she has no contact with that person who is the father of her child. She also does not want to have any more children.

Financial conditions

As a manual labourer she gets 250 rupees as daily wage and on an average she gets four or five days of work in a week. She has four cents of land and a small house in that. She got the land and house from the state government under the EMS Housing Project. There is a special welfare package for the *Adiya* and *Paniya* tribes and as part of it she also gets rice free of cost.

Health issues

Even though Ramani is an unwed mother she has no health issues. She could not notice any adverse impact of pregnancy and childbirth on her health. At the same time she is not happy with the care received during pregnancy and childbirth. She could not get special nutritious food during pregnancy and had to satisfy her hunger with whatever food she gets. She was worried about the health of the foetus inside her womb. As her parents died earlier she had to depend on the relatives and neighbours for any help. Anyway, now for herself and the child there are no serious health problems and they lead a normal life. When they are occasionally affected by any illness they get medicine from the local government hospital or dispensaries. They do not require any regular medical treatment. There are no medical facilities closer to their hamlet and always go to the nearby town for visiting a doctor. PHC is also far away and she has no habit of visiting there. Sometimes she also visits the private hospitals in their locality. Moreover, there are certain home remedies prepared by her or seek the advice of the elderly neighbours who also prescribe medicines especially for minor illnesses.

Ramani's health problems are minor and it does not affect her ability to engage in manual labour. Usually she goes for work daily. However, when she or her child get sick she cannot go for work and in such occasions she had to depend on others. Her mother's younger sister and her children living in the same hamlet mainly support her. Earlier Ramani was living in their house after the death of her parents. Only after she got a house of her own from the government she left their house. Even now her maternal aunt and her children support her whenever she had some difficulties. She also occasionally receives

support from ASHA workers and tribal promoter. They provide information about schemes that are beneficial for her and the child.

Cultural conflicts

After she became an unwed mother she had a feeling of isolation in the community. Her relatives and neighbours did not approve her action and most of them ridiculed her and kept a distance from her. She was also not welcomed in auspicious occasions like a marriage function. Now Ramani also does not justify what happened in her life. Her only wish is the proper upbringing of her son.

For her there was no formal marriage in a ritualistic manner. She was not either expelled from her own family or community. No religious or community sanctions were imposed against her. After became pregnant the ASHA worker took her to the hospital. She is not aware of the *Snehasparsham* project of government. She does not know of any other benefits to the unwed mothers. None of the NGOs also supported her in any manner.

Ramani is worried about her present condition. Even though she is alone, she does not want to marry anybody. She is confident that she can take care of her son by doing hard work. When she goes for work her maternal aunt takes care of the child. She needs such support more till the child starts going to school. Ramani feels that customary marital practices of her community were better than the present marriage system which is controlled by the rules and regulations of the government. She does not found any value in fixing a minimum age of marriage for both the bride and groom.

Case 3

Vimala is a 28 year old unwed mother belonging to the *Tholpetty* Paniya settlement. She is the only child of her parents and completed only 4th standard education. Now she works as an agricultural labourer and lives with her little daughter in her own family with parents. She belongs to a nuclear family. Her parents are also agricultural labourers. But as they are getting older they are not able to go for work regularly. Practically Vimala is the main bread winner of the family and shoulder the responsibilities of her daughter and parents.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Vimala had a love affair with a man belonging to non tribal community before she attained the age of 20 years. This led her to engage in sexual relations with that person and eventually she became pregnant. She became pregnant at the age of 20 years and gave birth to a girl child. After that some quarrels developed between them and the man was not ready to take responsibility as the father of the child. He belonged to Muslim community and lived in a nearby village. Even before the birth of the child Vimala severed all relations with him and now she don't expect that he will come back and take care of her and the child. She considers that a marriage as per the traditions of the community is good. Then parents find a partner for their daughter. Vimala is really sad as her action pained her parents and they had to face the ridicule of the community. They remained silent when faced the questions of neighbours and relatives. But the parents never scolded Vimala even though they were humiliated by many. Now she feels that it is better to get married after becoming mature and completing the studies. It is better to have children after marriage.

Her partner belonged to a different community and she was not willing to disclose his details. She has only one daughter and never had any miscarriage before or after. She remained unmarried even though she gave birth to a child at the age of 20 years. Now she has no plan for marriage. Her only ambition in life is to give good education to her daughter and bring her up as a good person.

She gave birth to her daughter in the nearby government hospital and her parents supported her during pregnancy and delivery. Later she had taken vaccination for her child. Now she has no contact with the person who is the father of her child. She never expects that once he will come back and accept her and the daughter. She lost all hope for a happy married life with that person.

Financial conditions

Vimala is an agricultural labourer and goes for work up to six days in a week. She gets 250 rupees as daily wage. Occasionally her parents go for work and their earnings are

also spent for meeting expenses of the family. They have five cents of land and a house in it owned by her father. Being the only daughter of her parents Vimala will get this property after the death of her parents. They have no income from the land. As all three in the family go for work they have no serious financial problems. At the same time they have no savings in the bank or elsewhere.

Health issues

Vimala, being an unwed mother, does not have any specific health issues. She has no adverse impact on her health due to pregnancy and childbirth. As she is living with her parents they supported her well during those periods. When she was carrying she had interest for some special food items and her parents arranged it for her. Parental support was a blessing for her. After the birth of the child she was given good nutritious food. So, now Vimala and her daughter are remaining healthy. They don't require any regular medicines and they visit hospital only when affected by some illnesses occasionally. Some medical facilities are available in the nearby area. She also visits the PHC when there is need for immunisation for her child. They have no need to go to hospitals too far away.

She also acknowledges the support received from the ASHA workers and tribal promoters. When she was pregnant they visited her house and provided necessary support and guidance. Regarding the immunisation of her child also she got guidance from them.

Cultural conflicts

Society often treated her as a woman with lose morals and this pained her. She is not expelled from the community and living with her parents. She wishes to look after the child well and give her good education. She feels that a woman's life is more vulnerable and she lose her dignity forever after involved in an illicit relation that results in unwed motherhood. However, her child is not discriminated by anybody in the community for being the daughter of an unwed mother.

She heard about the *Snehasparsham* project of the state government, but never applied for any assistance under this project. She is not aware of any other official project for

supporting the unwed mothers. She also did not receive any support from voluntary organizations.

Case 4

Lalitha is a 40 year old illiterate, unwed mother living with her daughter in the Paniya colony at Besoor. Both of her parents died and now she lives with her sister. She has a brother too. Originally, during her childhood, she was a member of a joint family.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Due to the death of Lalitha's parents during her childhood there was nobody to arrange her marriage. Her siblings had their own struggles in life so that they were not in a position to arrange her marriage. Being an illiterate woman she had limited knowledge about the nature of exploitation suffered by women. As she crossed the age of marriage she easily got attracted to a man who showed her sympathy and love. Actually it was a trap used by that man to satisfy his sexual urge. Lalitha got attracted to him as she believed in the promise of that man who assured her that he will marry her.

She had an affair with a non-tribal man and she lived with him for many months without marriage. That person showed love to her and promised her that he will marry her. She does not know to which religion he belongs. After Lalitha became pregnant he changed his word and started keeping distance from her. He refused to marry her and said that he is not responsible for the pregnancy. Eventually she was totally abandoned by that man and she returned to her sister's home. Her sister accepted Lalitha in her family as her parents were no more. At the age of 27 she gave birth to a baby girl. Later she decided not to marry and gave all attention to her daughter. She never had any miscarriages before or after her delivery. She does not want the companionship of men anymore and feel that they show love to girls in order to exploit them.

She gave birth to the child in the local government hospital. The child was given vaccination at due intervals. Now she has no contact with the father of her child. She had a feeling of betrayal regarding the behaviour of that person. But she has not filed any complaint in any agency against that person responsible for her pregnancy.

Financial conditions

Lalitha is a manual labourer in the agricultural sector. She gets 250/- rupees daily. However, as she had health problems, she often goes for work on two or three days in a week. She has four cents of land and a dilapidated house in it received from the state government. As she cannot live in that house because of its poor condition, she lives in the house of her sister. Her daughter studies in the nearby *Ashram* school.

Health issues

Lalitha has many health problems. She suffers from chest pain, back ache and hearing problems. She considers herself as a patient. When she was pregnant she did not get support from ASHA worker or ICDS *Anganwadi*. She did not approach them for any help and relied on her sister and children. Her sister is also an agricultural labourer with poor financial background. Therefore, Lalitha could not consume nutritious food when she was pregnant. Moreover, she did not visit the PHC or local government hospital for any medical check up and directly went to hospital at the time of her delivery. She also engaged in manual labour as usual during her pregnancy period. Thus she could not get either good food or rest when it was needed for her the most. After delivery also she did not get any special food or treatment in the family as her sister was busy with her daily work and had no money to get nutritious food for Lalitha. In spite of all these adversities her child remains healthy except the occasional minor illnesses.

Cultural conflicts

Now there is nobody to support except her sister and there is total uncertainty about the future. Even though she wants to give good food and education to her daughter she has no means for that. She has much mental agony and often remains at a depressed mood. She is not expelled from the community even though the fellow members do not approve her action. Now she and her daughter remain as dependent on others. She has no idea about *Snehasparsham* or any other government project for supporting unwed mothers. She never applied for financial support from any government agency. She did not receive any support from voluntary organizations either.

Case 5

Ragini is a 36 year old Paniya unwed mother living in Thonikadavu tribal settlement at Thirunelly Panchayath. She is an illiterate woman living as an agricultural labourer. Her father died and she has mother, one sister and a brother. During her childhood she belonged to a joint family and now she lives in her own family with her daughter. She gets support from her mother and siblings when needed. Even though now she lives alone her relatives are in the neighbourhood. She also earns something by engaging in wage labour. She still remains as an unwed mother and has no plan to get married in future.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

At the age of 25 years she had a love affair with a man who also belongs to a tribal community. They did not have any formal marriage but lived together for many months. In course of time she became pregnant. Then that person lost interest in her and abandoned her on some silly grounds. Then she returned to her family and her mother supported her. She gave birth to a baby girl in a local hospital. She had no miscarriages before or after her delivery. The child also received vaccination at the proper intervals from the local PHC. Now she has no contact with the father of her child and lost hope that he will come back some day and accept her and the child.

Ragini became an unwed mother as she was cheated by her lover who promised her to marry. After reaching the present stage she does not care what others think about her. She fully concentrates in her work and gives prime importance for the proper upbringing of her daughter. So, nobody approached her with any evil intention and she does not want a marriage any more. Now she feels that sexual relation before marriage should be avoided. Marriage shall be arranged by the parents at the right time. She does not oppose love marriage where people find out his/her own life partner. But, at the same time, those who fall in love shall inform their parents about their intention to marry somebody so that with their support they can enter into marital life. This is helpful to get social support when the couple faces some struggles in their life.

Financial conditions

Ragini is earning an income as an agricultural labourer. She goes up to six days of work in a week and receives 250 to 300 rupees daily. She has no other income. She has her own house, but no ownership over the land where it is constructed. It is forest land and she has anxiety about the possibility of eviction from there. She does not receive any financial support from government.

Health issues

She has no specific health issues due to pregnancy and child birth. As the pregnancy was in a hospital she got needed medical care. Later after reaching home she got support from mother. Thus she retained the capacity to engage in manual labour. During the period of pregnancy her mother provided special nutritious food to her that was helpful to ensure the health of the child as well as herself. Now also she tries to give nutritious food to her daughter. When she was pregnant she got guidance from the ASHA worker of that locality.

There are no serious health problems for her and the child except the occasional minor illnesses. When they are sick they visit the local government hospital and do not require regular medications. There are no medical facilities close to her hamlet. She has no awareness about the services obtained from the PHC in the nearby village. She has no indebtedness created by the treatment expenses.

Cultural conflicts

Ragini has no hesitation to reveal the identity of her former partner. She introduces him as the biological father of her child. She does not want to bow her head before others for what she did in her life. Even though she does not approve what happened to her she is bold enough to say how it happened and which person is responsible for that.

She is not expelled from her community even though the fellow members do not approve her action. She still keeps good relation with her family members and neighbours. She generally attends all functions like marriage, naming ceremony etc and does not care what others think and talk about her. Her only goal in life is the proper upbringing of her daughter.

She came to know from the ASHA workers about the financial support to unwed mothers by government. She did not apply for that as she does not want to be known as an unwed mother. She does not need any such financial support. She is also not aware of any support for unwed mothers by the voluntary organizations.

Case 6

Devaki is a 45 year old Paniya unwed mother living in a tribal settlement at Ambalavayal. She studied up to fourth standard and is now working as an agricultural labourer in the coffee estates and paddy fields near to her settlement. She has a 20 year old daughter who is a dropout from 10th standard. She also has a 17 year old son who is also a school dropout and now working as a manual labourer. Her family was a joint type of family in the past. But now she lives in a very poor condition. This is a nuclear family now, consisting of Devaki, her mother and Devaki's two children. Devaki is the eldest in the family. Her brother works in a quarry as a wage labourer. He is married and Devaki has not much contact with his family. He has two children. Devaki did not see him for many years.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Her father passed away when she was very small. Mother had her boy friends. But at that time there was no issue in that behaviour in their hamlet. These men supported her and her mother also. But now, no one is there to support her. Devaki is left alone with her two children.

Devaki had an affair with a non tribal man when she was around the age of 20 years. He was a Hindu and much elder to her. She fell in love with him. His own place is Palakkad and he came here searching for work. He worked in the coffee estate as wage labourer. Devaki met him near her house and gradually they had an affair. Devaki later came to know that he had wife and children at home. But he told Devaki that he is single and that his family will accept her as his wife.

Devaki got pregnant at the age of 22 years first, but got aborted. Then again, she conceived at 25 years from the same person. She had some physical problems and she does not know exactly what it is. Her partner was in constant contact with her. Both of

them lived like a family without marriage. But when she finally conceived at the age of 25, and gave birth to her elder daughter, he slowly showed signs of withdrawal from her home and eventually stopped coming and meeting Devaki and later she had no idea about him.

Devaki delivered her first child at a Government hospital. She lives in a place known as Ambalavayal. She had three miscarriages and two deliveries. ASHA workers helped her to take vaccinations and ICDS *Anganwadi* workers also supported in getting food, etc. She had a daughter and a son.

Her younger son is now 17 years old. Son was born from an affair with a different person. After the first person abandoned her she gradually got attached to another person and had sexual contacts with him. He is also a man from outside the community and came to her place as a wage labourer. Even though he wishes to support Devaki he is unable to do that as he had to take care of his own wife and children. But still he gives her money at times.

Financial conditions

Devaki goes for NREGS work and road construction work and thus earn a living. She needs money to support her children and for meeting her mother's medical needs. Devaki also suffers from all sorts of illness. Occasionally she borrows money from others in the hamlet or from outsiders to meet such expenses. Then she finds it difficult to repay the money borrowed.

She goes for NREGS work and wage labour. She gets Rs 300 a day when she goes for work outside. She can get work all day a month but her health won't allow her to do so. Practically she can go for maximum of 15 days a month. Her son who is now 17 years old also goes for work after discontinuing studies at 10th standard. But he had the habit of drinking liquor since he was 14 years of age and therefore Devaki didn't get any support from him. Her daughter also goes for manual work in the nearby plantations and gives her some support. Devaki is worried about arranging the marriage of her daughter and had anxiety about the expenses involved.

There are three cents of land and a house in it allotted to the mother of Devaki from government. Devaki has either no house or land. She borrowed money from many persons. There are only very less things at her home. She didn't receive any benefits from Grama Panchayat or any other government or voluntary agency. Only the ICDS personnel used to give her and her children food when they were young.

Health issues

Devaki feels sickly always. She is not well at all. All the time she had a feeling of fatigue and suffers from constant headache. Her pregnancy period was horrible as there was no support from her relatives. There was conflict between her family and relatives. Hence Devaki had to move out from her family after she became pregnant. So there was no female member to look after her. Devaki's mother came with her later only. May be because of the lack of care she had back pain, pain in knee etc. Also she had often stomach pain. With the help of *Anganwadi* workers and helpers, she got vaccination for her children. When she fell ill, she depended on tribal traditional medicine woman as she need not spend money for that. She took their medicine with real trust and got relief. She is not familiar with allopathic medicine and generally she does not go to PHC. ASHA workers used to visit her house and invited her to attend the medical camps. But she never does that.

Cultural conflicts

At present Devaki has no connection with her first partner. Even though the second partner gives some help occasionally that is not at all giving any substantial relief to her financial difficulties. She is feeling very much stress now, as many men later tried to abuse her, since she had no men to protect herself.

In the past, as per tribal tradition, marriage was not a big thing. If a girl and boy fall in love among each other they can live together even without any marriage. Divorces were also very common in those days. Tribes had a community living. But today, it is difficult. Devaki feels that it is very shameful nowadays to live as an unwed mother. Marriage is necessary before starting to live together. Children will feel ashamed if their mother is not married properly. Now, no community living is possible. Now the tribes live in

nuclear families and therefore proper marriage is better for the safety of the women and children.

Devaki feels that Government should support unwed mothers. They need better livelihood options. She never heard about the *Snehasparsam* project of the government. She didn't get any help either from her family or from the community. She has no idea about the Government schemes which support unwed mothers in achieving socio-economic development.

Case 7

Seema is a 34 year old Paniya unwed mother living in the Edavana tribal settlement. She is a dropout of the 10th standard and now works as a wage labourer and a beneficiary of the NREGS of government. She has a daughter who is 10 years old. Father abandoned Seema and her mother when she was eight years old. Her mother lives with her now. Seema has an elder sister who is married and staying with her husband at Muthanga. Sister seldom visits this home. Seema receives no support from anyone else.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Seema got acquainted with a Kurumba (another tribe) man at the age of 21. They both liked each other. But marriage between a Paniya and a Kurumba is impossible in the normal course even now. Customary tribal rules do not permit that. The Kurumba tribe has much higher social status than the Paniyas. Hence, his family objected the marriage to take place. But then she got pregnant at the age of 23. They thought they could live together but it didn't work out. Later he married a Kurumba girl and Seema remained an unwed mother. Seema was pregnant only once. She delivered her child at a nearby government hospital. At present, she has no contact with the father of her child.

Financial condition

Seema and her mother both do stitching to find a living. It is bit unusual in their place and among tribes. A Christian family, where her mother used to go for domestic work, taught her mother tailoring and her mother taught her too. She depends on tailoring work when she finds it difficult to go out for agricultural work.

Seema's mother also goes for work in a Christian convent near their home. Hence the nuns at the convent helped her with food and clothes. Later they asked Seema whether she like to learn stitching. They have an apparel centre and needed women to do stitching. Through the stitching work they were able to earn a living.

They own a house in three cents of land. They have no other possession or assets. Seema's mother is getting widow pension and Seema receives *Snehasparsam*, pension for the unwed mothers from the Social Security Mission, Govt of Kerala.

Health issues

Seema is having depression often. Then she is unable to work. Her pregnancy period was looked after by her mother. At the same time because of poverty her mother could not provide special nutritious food to her. Because of her mother's acquaintance with the convent, they follow allopathic medicine and get medical assistance from government hospital. Her child is healthy and all vaccination injections were taken to her.

Cultural conflicts

There is stigma against them from the community, since theirs is a woman only household, but the convent people mingle with them and give all possible support. Seema wishes to marry now. But it is difficult to find somebody. The community also does not approve her status as an unwed mother and her relation with a Kurumba man. Usually the Paniyas and Kurumbas keep a distance between them and members of each community believe that they are superior to the other group.

Case 8

Ammu is a 40 year old Paniya unwed mother living in the Kokkuzhy tribal settlement. She has a 20 year old daughter who is a dropout of 10th standard. Ammu and her daughter live in their own house in a three cent plot received from government.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Ammu had a love affair with a tribal man before she reached the age of 20 years. Both of them wanted to get married and lived like husband and wife. Eventually she became pregnant and at the age of 20 years she gave birth to her only daughter. After the birth of the daughter some conflicts developed between them and gradually her partner showed

distance from her and eventually abandoned Ammu and her daughter. Later he got married to another girl from a nearby hamlet and now he is living in his wife's place. Now Ammu has no contact with the father of her daughter. Only Ammu's mother supported her during her pregnancy period and after childbirth.

Financial conditions

Ammu is working as a wage labourer in the agricultural sector in the nearby plantations. Sometime she gets regular work and in the off season she gets work only for one or two days in a week. She normally gets 300 rupees as daily wage. Her daughter stopped her studies after the failure in the SSLC examination. She is not interested in doing wage labour and now learns stitching. Anyway she has no regular income and depends on Ammu for all her needs.

Health issues

Ammu's delivery was in the nearby government hospital and she took all needed vaccination injections to her daughter. Now both Ammu and her daughter have no serious health problems and they need not spend much money for medicines and treatment. When she was pregnant Ammu was supported by her mother only. Due to poverty her mother could not provide special nutritious food to her while she was carrying. But her delivery was normal and child was healthy. Now Ammu mainly depends on the public distribution system of the government for getting rice and other essential commodities. During the lean season Ammu used to borrow money from members of the community or from outsiders. She has no cultivation in the land and purchases everything from the nearby shops.

Occasionally medical camps are organized in her locality or in the nearby town by some voluntary organizations. At that time Ammu visits those places and get the benefit. They have good source of drinking water near to her house.

Cultural conflicts

Even though Ammu is an unwed mother she is not facing any social stigma as such even though the fellow members of the society do not approve her action. Ammu herself feels that the traditional tribal marriage is preferable and she does not agree with the marriage

with the non tribes or with the members of other tribal communities in her locality. She is very careful about the behaviour of her daughter and wishes to arrange her marriage with a member of the Paniya community only.

Case 9

Priya is a 40 year old Paniya woman living in the Padinjarethara tribal settlement. She has a daughter studying in the 8th standard in the nearby government school. After the birth of the child she got married to a person of the same community. Priya lives with her husband and daughter in their own house in a three cent plot received from government.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Priya studied only up to 4th standard. In order to support her parents she was working as a manual labourer in the plantations near her home. At the age of 20 years she had a love affair with the husband of her own sister. They had no plan to get married but they mingled closely as both of them liked each other. Such an infatuation eventually led them to sexual contacts and Priya became pregnant. Afterwards her lover alienated her and she gave birth to her daughter in the nearby government hospital. Her mother supported her in the difficult times and shared her responsibilities in bringing up the child.

Later she got married to a Paniya man who was much elder to her. Priya's husband is a drunkard and she or her daughter does not get any support from him. Now Priya has no contact with the father of her child.

Financial conditions

Priya is now earning a living by working as a manual labourer in the plantations and in other people's land. Earlier she learned stitching but could not develop it as a profession for her. It was mainly because of her inability to purchase a sewing machine for her. She finds it difficult to meet the needs of the family and her daughter who is studying in the nearby school. As her husband is a drunkard sometime he takes away the money kept by Priya in the house. Normally Priya goes for six days of work in a week. She gets around 300 rupees daily as wage. During the rainy season she does not get work so that they have serious financial difficulties even to purchase food. In those days she depends on the free ration provided by the government to the tribes.

Health issues

During her pregnancy and childbirth she got the support of her mother. Mother took her to the government hospital during the pregnancy period and for childbirth. She also visits the nearby PHC for some of the minor ailments. Priya could not get special nutritious food during her pregnancy as her mother had no means for that. But her child is healthy and Priya always tries to give her good food and medical treatment when required.

The nurses in the hospital and ASHA workers told her about the need for taking vaccination to her child. Accordingly she visited the PHC and took the various immunisation injections to her child. Priya has some health problems like back pain, head ache etc. She says that due to poverty she is not able to get good food to herself and her daughter. When she is sick she either depends on some home remedies or the tribal medicine man in a nearby settlement. Before her daughter was admitted in school Priya sent her to the local ICDS *Anganwadi* which was a normal practice in her hamlet. From there the child used to get nutritious food.

Cultural conflicts

As Priya became pregnant through the affair with the husband of her own sister there was much problem in her family. All the family members and even the neighbours criticized her and her partner. Anyway she was not ousted from the family and the community. Now Priya repents about what has happened to her. Her marriage is also not successful as the husband is a drunkard.

She is aware of the *Snehasparsam* project of the state government but has not applied for the pension. She was told by somebody that a married woman, even though she gave birth to a child before marriage, is not eligible to get the support of *Snehasparsam*. She is also not supported by any NGO or other voluntary organizations.

Case 10

Sindhu is a 40 year old unwed mother of Paniya community living with her daughter (18) and son (15) in Thirumangalam tribal settlement. She lives with her relatives in a joint family set up. Sindhu is an illiterate and her daughter is a drop out of 7th standard and son a drop out of 5th standard. Sindhu's parents, sister and her children are living with them in

the same household. It is a small house constructed in a three cents plot received from the government.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Sindhu had a love affair before she reached the age of 20 years. Her friend also belongs to the same community and was a manual labourer. Both of them worked together and gradually developed a strong bond between them. They considered sexual contact as quite natural and eventually Sindhu became pregnant at the age of 22 years. Later she gave birth to a girl child in the nearby hospital. Her parents supported her during pregnancy and childbirth. Even after the birth of her daughter the relationship continued and again at the age of 25 years Sindhu became pregnant and later gave birth to a baby boy. Even after that the partner was not ready to marry Sindhu and he gradually abandoned her and the children. He later got married to another woman of the same community. Now Sindhu has no contact with the father of her children.

Two years ago the daughter of Sindhu eloped with a man and now she has a two year old child. After the birth of the child the man abandoned them and now Sindhu's daughter is with her. She accepted both of them. Sindhu has put up a complaint with the Child Line authorities but no action has been taken against the man responsible for the pregnancy.

Financial conditions

Sindhu and her family members have very poor financial conditions. Sindhu and her parents and sister go for wage labour in the nearby plantations and under NREGS. As the family has many members to feed it is very difficult to satisfy the needs of everybody. Occasionally they get some financial support from the Tribal Development Department. Often they borrow money from neighbours which they find difficult to repay. They have a cow received from the Tribal Development Department under a welfare scheme. They get some money by selling the milk of the cow in the nearby milk marketing society. Names of her both children are not included in the ration card due to some clerical mistakes. She has great difficulty due to this as the children do not get food materials from the ration shop.

Health issues

Delivery of Sindhu's both children took place in the nearby government hospital and her mother supported her during that occasion. She has also obtained all vaccination for both children from the PHC. When Sindhu was pregnant her mother could not provide her special food due to her poverty. It affected her health to some extent and now she has many health problems. Occasionally she visits the nearby government hospital for medicine. Both of her children are reasonably healthy even though the health of her daughter was adversely affected after her delivery. When medical camps are organized in her locality Sindhu visits them for getting free treatment and medicine.

Sindhu has applied for financial support to government under the *Snehasparsam* project. But her application was rejected as she is an unwed mother with two children. While rejecting her application the authorities said that this project supports only those unwed mothers with a single child. Anyway Sindhu has put up an application for the second time and now waits for the result.

There is no drinking water facility near to the house of Sindhu and she needs to walk a long distance to collect water.

Cultural conflicts

Sindhu considers what happened to her as something natural in her community. According to her marriage is not an essential prerequisite for engaging in sexual relations. She pointed out that in her community marriages were not seriously taken in the past and now it is due to the contact with the non tribal people such an importance was given to marriage. She admits that now traditional tribal marriage practices are not approved by the law of the country and that is why some of the tribal youth are arrested by police when they get married before the age of 21 for boys and 18 for girls.

According to Sindhu unwed mother is not a target of social stigma in the tribal communities. But an unwed mother finds it difficult to take care of the child without the support of the man due to their poverty. Livelihood issue is the most serious concern. Therefore the birth of the child after marriage is preferable mainly due to financial

reasons and not due to cultural factors. Such a child would be protected collectively by both parents.

Sindhu is very much concerned about the future of her daughter who is also an unwed mother herself because in the present time unwed mothers face more social stigma due to the influence of non tribal cultural values. Arranging marriage for such a girl is also very difficult.

Case 11

Malu is an 18 year old Paniya unwed mother living in the Thirumangalam tribal settlement. She is the daughter of an unwed mother and she has one brother also. Malu is a dropout of 7th standard and now fetching a livelihood through wage labour. She has a two year old son and now lives with her mother.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Malu grew up with children of her mother's relatives. She was not interested in going to school and dropped out of 7th standard. Later she remained at home helping her mother and looking after her younger brother. After reaching the age of 15 years she also started going for manual labour outside the home. Later she fell in love with a Paniya man who was much elder to her. He was a 40 years old manual labourer. First they met each other at the work place. Without informing anybody in the settlement they went to Nilambur, a place in the nearby Malappuram district. Their plan was to settle down there after marriage. Anyway they didn't go for any marriage formally and started living like husband and wife. In course of time Malu became pregnant and later her partner went to Coorg; a place in the nearby Karnataka state, in search of work. However, he did not come back and Malu waited in vain. As there were no relatives in Nilambur she struggled a lot. She delivered her child in the Nilambur government hospital and after one year she returned to her mother's home and her mother accepted her and her son. Even after coming back to her mother's place Malu expected that her partner will come back and take care of herself and their son. But later she heard that her friend married another Paniya girl and now living in Gudalloor; a place in the nearby Tamil Nadu state. After this she has lost all hope of his return to her.

Financial conditions

Malu is living as a manual labourer who engages in agricultural work in the nearby plantations and also the work opportunities provided by the employment guarantee programme of the central government. She is also supported by her mother to some extent. Her brother is angry with her mother and Malu as both of them are unwed mothers. So he moved out of their family and now lives in a nearby settlement. Even though he is also a wage labourer and earns money he never supports his mother and sister. Her mother had three cents of land and a house in it received from the government. Malu cannot go for work regularly as she has a small child. When her mother goes for work there is nobody to look after the child. Occasionally when the child gets sick she has to remain at home. She has no bank deposit or any other income and occasionally borrows money from her relatives or neighbours.

Now she learned tailoring from a local institute and gets some money from that job. She used to get the stitching work of her friends and neighbours. Malu wishes to rear a cow and to get some income out of that. But her serious handicap is that she has no place to keep the cow as they live in a three cents plot.

She gets 1000 rupees per month as pension under the *Snehasprsam* project. But often she never gets this money regularly which aggravates her hardship. Her child gets food materials from the nearby ICDS *Anganwadi*. She also gets rice and some other articles from the ration shop.

Health issues

Malu's delivery took place at a government hospital. As she was living alone in Nilambur during her pregnancy period she could not consume any nutritious food at that time. Also after delivery she did not get any special diet or proper rest. She had no miscarriage or a second delivery. There was nobody to help her to take the vaccination of her child properly.

Now she has constant stomach ailments. But she has no means to go and get medicine mainly because of lack of money. As mother daily go for wage labour she has no time to

accompany Malu to meet a doctor. Malu believes that her early pregnancy might have adversely affected her health.

Occasionally medical camps are organized in her locality. But Malu rarely visit such medical camps because no lady doctors are available in such camps. Even though Malu had some gynaecological problems she is not interested to visit the male doctors.

Malu is also affected by mental depression because of what happened in her life. When she see her friends of the same age either studying or leading a happy married life she repents about her lost opportunities and the present pathetic condition. Some of her friends work as tribal promoters and she remains as a manual labourer.

Cultural conflicts

Malu observed that even though her mother is an unwed mother she did not face much social stigma as such things were common in the past. But in her case, she is a target of social stigma as the values of her community changed a lot in the current period mainly because of the influence of non tribal value system and the new rules and regulations of the government. Malu has a low social status both in and out of her community. Inside the family, her brother is much upset and angry with her mother and Malu. That is why he moved out of the family and never supports them financially.

Her family is a target of social stigma as both mother and daughter are unwed mothers. The members of the new generation do not approve these types of aberrations. At the same time there are some men who approach her with an evil intention. As she is an young unwed mother some think that she could be easily persuaded for sexual act. Therefore, Malu feels insecure often even in her own household when she is alone. Now Malu wishes to have a proper marriage and to lead a decent life as she is only 18. But it is very difficult to get a man willing for that.

Malu is also not happy with the traditional pattern of life followed in her settlement. She likes the life outside the settlement with lot of freedom and opportunities for women. She feels that getting education is important before marriage. Now she wishes to give good education to his son; but worried about the means for that. She has strong faith in God

and hopeful about getting some help from somewhere in order to overcome the present crises in life.

Malu wishes to get some training in order to find out a livelihood. She thinks that wage labour is not at all a dependable profession as she may not get work during the off season. She can work only when she is physically fit. She feels that she has limited choices in life.

Case 12

Sreelatha is a 24 year old Paniya unwed mother living in the Moopan colony at Kokkuzhy. It is a small tribal settlement with 15 households. She has a three year old daughter. Both parents of Sreelatha are alive and she lives with them. She has three sisters and no brothers. She is a dropout of 4th standard and now earns her livelihood through wage labour.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

She had a love affair with a man of the same settlement before completing the age of 20 years. Parents of both Sreelatha and her lover did not approve this relation and they opposed their marriage. Therefore, both of them eloped and went to another settlement distant from their own and stayed there with the support of some friends of the man. Even though the parents of Sreelatha called her back she was not ready to leave her friend. No marriage was performed even though they lived like husband and wife. Later Sreelatha got pregnant and both of them were upset about it. Then one day her partner abandoned her as he was not ready to take the responsibility of Sreelatha and the child. He was also a drunkard with number of friends of poor character. Without any other option Sreelatha returned to her parental home and her parents accepted her even though they did not approve what happened to her. After a few months her boyfriend came back to the settlement and lives there. But there is no contact between Sreelatha and him.

Financial conditions

Sreelatha now lives with her parents and little daughter. She goes for wage labour and thus earns a livelihood. As her parents are getting old they are not able to go for work regularly. Her sisters are also living in the same settlement and she receives some

financial support from them. Sreelatha lives in the house owned by her father in a three cents plot. They have no income from the land. Even though she wants to rear a few goats and poultry she can't do that because of the shortage of space. Occasionally she borrows money from neighbours which she finds difficult to repay. This also sometimes leads to quarrels with them. She could not get the benefit of *Snehasparsam* project as she had no Adhar card or any other essential documents.

Health issues

Sreelatha gave birth to her child in a government hospital. Her mother was with her in the hospital. However, because of poverty her mother could not arrange any special food to her before or after the delivery. The child is healthy and Sreelatha gave all vaccinations to her from the PHC near to their settlement. Now Sreelatha gets milk and other nutritious food to her and the child from the local ICDS *Anganwadi* which is a great relief for her.

Sreelatha had no miscarriages earlier and no other gynaecological complaints. But going for wage labour without proper rest and timely intake of food adversely affect her health. She has ailments like back-pain, headache, dizziness etc. Occasionally she visits the PHC or the government hospital for medicine. She believes that her pregnancy at a tender age without proper care adversely affected her health.

Cultural conflicts

Being an unwed mother Sreelatha is the target of social stigma in her community. Even though her parents support her they are also unhappy with what happened to her. Some of her friends criticised for her elopement with a boy who was a drunkard. As he belonged to the same settlement his poor character was known to everybody. Now Sreelatha wishes to have a proper marriage. But it is very difficult because of her past deeds. Her parents are also not taking initiative for arranging her marriage as they have no hope to get a proper match for her.

Case 13

Devika is a 32 year old Paniya unwed mother living in the Vijayamandiram tribal colony. It is a small tribal settlement with only six houses. She has a son of 14 years of age who

is studying in the 9th standard in a local government school. Both her parents are alive and she has also a younger sister and no brothers. Devika lives with her parents, son and sister in an extended family. She is a dropout of the 6th standard.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Devika was a fair and beautiful girl and she had a love affair with a non-tribal man from outside her hamlet. He was a Hindu Nair working as a taxi driver in the nearby town. This man was also a bachelor at that time and he promised to marry Devika. She believed his word and allowed him to visit her house when her parents go for work. This relation continued for many months and eventually Devika became pregnant at the age of 17 years. After knowing about it he stopped coming to her house. When Devika contacted him he refused to marry her. Later he got married to a Nair woman and leading a family life with two children. Her parents were shocked of what happened to Devika; but they supported her. At the age of 18 years Devika gave birth to a baby boy and now she has no contact with the man who is the father of her son.

Financial conditions

All the members in the family of Devika including herself are wage labourers who go for manual labour in the nearby estates or in the land of non-tribal landlords. Her father also works as a mahout on a part-time basis. When he has no job in the agricultural field he goes for this work. During the festival season he may not come home for many weeks. On an average the women labours get around 300 rupees daily which is not sufficient to satisfy their needs. Moreover, they do not get work continuously and during rainy season they remain at home for many weeks. In those days they depend on the free ration provided by the government. The situation becomes worse if somebody get sick in the family. Devika is not getting the benefit of *Snehasparsam* project. Even though she has applied for that her application was rejected as she could not produce a certificate that she is not married now.

Health issues

As mentioned earlier Devika did not get special diet and proper rest during her pregnancy and after she delivered her son. A few weeks after the delivery Devika had to go for wage

labour because of the poor financial conditions in her family. In her later life she always gives preference to give good food to her son and sacrificed her wants and pleasures. Moreover she experiences mental depression occasionally after thinking about the incidents happened in her past life. May be because of all these bitter experiences now she has many health problems. She has inflammation in the neck very often but never went for any serious treatment mainly because of her poverty. If she goes to hospital one day she will lose her wage.

Her son is healthy and Devika always give good food and all other possible care to him. Her only ambition in life is to give good education to him. She believes that one day all her hardships will be over when her son gets a good job in the government sector after completing his studies.

Cultural conflicts

Devika is a target of social stigma especially because she became pregnant through a relation with a non-tribal man living outside their settlement. Members of Paniya community believe that they are a special group and always promote endogamous marriage. They also consider that sexual relation with non-tribal outsiders is not approved by god.

Devika herself finds that her friends are leading a happy family life with their husbands and children. Some of them are also working as tribal promoters or in some private companies and earns a good income. Devika feels that she has spoiled her life and at the same time she does not want to have a marriage now. She generally has distrust towards men and does not want to go for a second experiment.

She now believes that the traditional marriage practice in her community is good and where parents take responsibility to find out a good boy to their daughter. Here both husband and wife get the support of the family and community when there are some crises in the marital life.

Case 14

Shalini is a 24 year old Paniya unwed mother living in the Thorakodukunnu tribal settlement. Her father deserted Shalini's mother when she was a small child. Now Shalini

lives with her mother, only sister and son. Mother brought them up with the help of her brother and family. They have 50 cents of land and a house of their own in it. Shalini's son studies in a local government school.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Shalini was a good student who completed her SSLC examination with several A+ and A grades. When she was in the high school class she fell in love with a senior student studying in a higher class of the same school. Boyfriend of Shalini was a person belonging to the non-tribal community. Both of them wanted to marry each other. In the mean time they had sexual relations and Shalini became pregnant at the age of 16 years. Even though Shalini was a good student she had to discontinue her studies after becoming pregnant. She later delivered a boy child.

Both Shalini and her boyfriend were below 18 years of age when she became pregnant and the boy promised that he will marry her once they reach the age of 18 years. Initially after the pregnancy of Shalini was diagnosed the boy put pressure on her to abort the foetus. But Shalini did not agree to that. After she gave birth to the child Shalini got the support of her mother and sister to raise the child. Even though Shalini waited for her partner after achieving the age of 18 years he never turned up. After a while Shalini lost hope of his return. Now she has no contact with the father of her son.

Financial conditions

Now Shalini, her mother and sister work as wage labourers in the plantations and in the land of the local non-tribal people. Shalini spends whatever she earns for the education and also for other needs of her son. The wage received by Shalini is not sufficient to meet the needs of the family and occasionally she had to borrow money from neighbours. Even though they have 50 cents of land they are not getting any income from that as most of this land is lying fallow. Due to scarcity of water they are not able to cultivate anything in this land. They have one cow and a few goats. Often Shalini's sister looks after them. Shalini and her family members now live in a new place where government allotted land to tribes after prolonged agitations. That is how they got 50 cents of land. To some extend

this was a relief for Shalini and her family as in the new place their neighbours do not know about their past.

An unexpected turn happened in Shalini's life when an NGO selected her as a project staff. As Shalini could create a good impression in the minds of the authorities of that NGO they selected her for higher studies. Along with another girl who also completed SSLC she was sent for ANM course. She completed the course and field practical with good marks. She now works as ANM in a nearby private medical college and earns a good salary.

Health issues

Shalini's delivery took place in a government hospital and her mother and sister supported her in those periods. She and her son have no serious health problems at present. When they have any minor diseases, they get medicine from the PHC or any nearby government hospital.

Cultural conflicts

As Shalini's family was a woman only family except the child, they had to face number of problems from the neighbours and non-tribal outsiders. Shalini's relatives and neighbours ridiculed her after she became pregnant. However, as Shalini got full support from the family nobody, in any way, exploited her further.

As now the family moved into a new place nobody knows the past of them. Shalini is not a target of social stigma now as she is employed and financially in a sound position. She is confident and enjoys a good social status. She wishes to marry a suitable man and expects to get a good alliance as she has a handsome income. At the same time she is very cautious in selecting a partner because of the bitter experiences she had earlier. Thus through the support of an NGO Shalini has reached a good place in her life and is looking towards future in an optimistic way.

Case 15

Sunitha is a 45 year old Paniya unwed mother living in the Chuzhaly tribal settlement. She is a dropout of 8th standard. Her parents died and she has one brother and no sisters. She gets support from own brother who is living in the same settlement. Sunitha has three

daughters and all of them live together in the same house that is owned by her. Elder daughter of Sunitha is a school dropout and the two younger ones are studying in school.

Circumstances leading to unwed motherhood

Sunitha was a fair and good looking girl. At the age of 19 years she had a love affair with a non-tribal man belonging to the Vaniyan Caste, whose traditional occupation was coconut oil extraction. She wanted to marry him and had complete trust in his promise. At the age of 20 years Sunitha became pregnant and the man was not ready to take any responsibility during her pregnancy period and delivery. Only her parents and brother was there to help her and she gave birth to a baby girl.

There was no contact between Sunitha and her partner for a while. However, later again that man came to her and they resumed their close contacts. In due course she gave birth to two more daughters again and was supported by her own family members. In spite of all these Sunitha's partner did not keep his word to marry her. Later he married a girl from his own community and had children in that wedlock. There was no contact between Sunitha and her partner in the later life and two years ago he passed away due to an illness.

The elder daughter of Sunitha is also a victim of false promise by a boy. At the age of 19 years she eloped with a boy of the Paniya community and two years later she returned with that man and a child. Now they are living with Sunitha which is an additional burden to her. So far their marriage was not registered even though they are living together for more than two years and now has a child too.

Financial conditions

Sunitha earn her livelihood through wage labour and is facing lot of problems in supporting the needs of her three children. Sunitha is the principal bread winner of her family and go for manual labour daily in the nearby plantations and in the land of non-tribal land owners. During the rainy season she may not get regular work and had serious financial problems. She is indebted as she borrowed money from friends and neighbours to support the needs of the family.

She has 20 cents of land which she received from her parents. But the land is barren and she does not get any income from that. House is owned by her and constructed by the financial support from the local gram panchayath. Being an unwed mother she does not receive any financial support from the government. She has no idea about the *Snehasparsam* project of the state government.

Health issues

The first delivery of Sunitha was at home and the second and third deliveries were at a nearby government hospital. She took vaccination for all her children from the local PHC. During pregnancy and childbirth no special care was obtained by Sunitha. Only her mother was there to support her and due to her poverty she could not provide special nutritious diet to Sunitha. She had no miscarriages. Due to malnutrition her children were not healthy especially in the early childhood. Now Sunitha has many health issues like thyroid complaint, fainting, anaemia, weight loss, back pain, etc. Recently she also suffers from high blood pressure. As she has no money and time she often could not get medical treatment in time. This aggravates her health problems. When she does not get time to go to hospital she purchases medicine from the local medical shops. During her pregnancy and post delivery period there was no proper care obtained by Sunitha so that she now believes that her health complaints are due to this.

Her complaint is that she did not get any assistance from the tribal promoters or ASHA workers regarding how to avail medical facilities provided by the government agencies. Occasionally when medical camps are organized in her locality, usually lady doctors are not available there. Therefore, she is not willing to visit such camps as she cannot open up to the male doctors.

Cultural conflicts

Sunitha said that she still lives only because of the support provided by her own brother. She gets no support from the community. Being an unwed mother she is a target of social stigma. She was ridiculed by the fellow members of the community for giving birth to many children without being married by her partner.

As she was good looking, some men approached her with ulterior motives. Often in her earlier life she was feeling insecure. In the past wedding was not a big issue in her community. When a boy and girl like each other they will live together. They will inform their parents and then live together. The wed lock may be terminated soon or last long. Nobody takes such separations seriously. Then both of them have the option to marry again with new partners. But today this flexible situation has changed. An unwed mother is a subject of ridicule. Sunitha says that even her children are against her for not living with their father. The eldest daughter had serious problem to accept that she is the daughter of an unwed mother. She both loves and hates her father. This has affected her mental strength. Sunitha is determined that she will not allow her children to become unwed mothers as happened to her. What happened to her daughter pains her much.

Conclusion

The case descriptions given in this chapter unfold the problems experienced by the tribal unwed mothers of Paniya community living in the Wayanad district of Kerala. The subjects interviewed reports some similarities in their experiences; all of them trusted the man with whom they had sexual relation, they believed that their association with this man will lead to marriage and the constitution of their family, none of them were ready to abort the foetus, all of them took responsibility to rear their child, being single mothers all of them struggles a lot to bring up their child, all of them provided immunisation to their child and none of them wanted to have such a plight to their child and in none of the cases the male partners responsible were not punished by any agency.

On the other hand there are plenty of differences also in their experiences; for some their partners belong to the same tribal community, partner of some others belong to a different tribal community, yet others got their partners from non-tribal community, some of them got parental support while others were supported by siblings, some had serious health problems due to pregnancy and childbirth at a tender age while others had no health problems due to pregnancy, some of them were targets of social stigma while others were not much alienated by the fellow members, while some of them received pension as part of *Snehasparsham* project others did not get that, only few of them got

married after giving birth to their child and majority of them remains unmarried, while some of them were assisted by the ASHA workers, ICDS *Anganwadi* workers and tribal promoters others did not get such support and so on.

“The government announced a rehabilitation project for the unwed mothers among tribes in 2011-12 that aimed at providing one-acre land with each for the landless among them, Rs.1,000/- as monthly aid and free residential education for their children. But the project failed, as numerous other tribal welfare schemes.

Tribal activists say that this is one of the major reasons behind the rise of suicides among tribes and mysterious infant deaths. There are hardly any attempts to trace the biological fathers of the children of these unwed mothers and to establish their legal rights” (Team Asianet, 2016).

In this way the present situation shows the gender dimension of this problem. While the male and female partners freely engaged in sexual relation the entire brunt of the whole episode is suffered by the women alone. The male partners are not affected in any way and most of them now lead a normal family life after a proper legal marriage with another woman. This indicates that as happening in many other situations here also the women are the targets of social stigma and are forced to take care of their child by their own resources alone.

Chapter Five

Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion

The present chapter deals with the analysis of the primary data collected by the researcher. An attempt has been made to raise a discussion based on the field data and its linkages with the available literature. Through the field work the researcher was able to identify the problems of the unwed mothers as really serious because the victims are most vulnerable belonging to one of the most marginalized sections of Kerala society.

Vulnerability of an unwed mother is multifaceted: she is a woman, a tribe, economically backward, illiterate or semi-literate, malnourished, unemployed, subjugated by men, and so on. Therefore it is comparatively easy for the cunning men, both inside and outside the tribal community to exploit them for satisfying their sexual desires. The men also do not expect any retaliation from these helpless women who have practically no resources of their own.

In tribal communities the institution of marriage was not as rigid as in the non-tribal communities in the past. A girl after reaching the age of menstruation was considered as fit for marriage as she is considered as grown up person. There was no fixed age of marriage for boys also. A boy passing the puberty stage was ready for marriage. Puberty rituals were also very common. Through the performance of such rituals a boy was accepted as a grown up one so that he can get married and form a family of his own. For example the members of Muthuvan community living in the Idukki district of Kerala follow such rituals. As part of the puberty rituals head of a boy is anointed with coconut oil after reaching the age of around 16 years. He is not permitted to cut his hair for the next one year. Then at the end of the year his hair is cut followed by a ceremonial bath. It is followed by a feast and other celebrations. In the same manner there are menstrual rituals. Here a girl after her first menstruation is taken to a special seclusion hut near to her house. For a few days she is expected to remain inside that hut with no contact with

others. Food will be supplied to her usually by her mother in that hut. She has to take bath daily in the early morning without being noticed by others in the community. Then after the periods are over she is taken to the nearby river for a ceremonial bath. She is accompanied by her friends. After coming back to the house some special rituals are performed by the priest in the community. The girl is presented with new clothes, flowers etc. After the rituals a sumptuous feast is offered to the fellow members of the community.

The tribes are not aware of the rules of marriage, including the minimum age of marriage followed in the non-tribal communities fixed by the laws of the country. So far there is no legislation in Kerala regulating the marriage practices of scheduled tribes. Even though the tribes have their own culture and way of life including own religion, language, food habits, customs etc still they were treated as Hindus for administrative purposes right from the colonial period. On the other hand in countries like America, Sweden, Australia and Canada appropriate legislations were formulated for the indigenous population with an anthropological and human rights outlook. In spite of the huge amount of money spent for achieving the goal of tribal development still their condition is far from satisfactory and pathetic in some cases. They are displaced from their original habitat for establishing development projects. In this situation the new legislations are also going against their interest.

Many of the traditional practices in the community are now treated as illegal as the new legislations are not taking into account the tribal way of life. Now they are not allowed to marry according to the customary marriage rules. They are also unaware of the marriage rules governing the non-tribal societies. For them any girl after entering the age of menstruation is fit to get married. They do not even have the clarity of the very concept of what 'age' is. Recently in Wayanad a girl from the Paniya community was married by a Hindu non-tribal man in a Hindu temple with the full support of the parents of both bride and groom. A few days after the marriage; the girl was summoned to the police station for collecting the details of her marriage including age. Later her husband was

arrested by police and cases were charged against him on the basis of Indian Penal Code, POSCO Act and The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Now the case is under trial (M. Venugopal, January 2018 *Pachakuthira*). This is a situation where the legislations for the general population are not sensitive to the peculiarities of tribal way of life and its customary practices. Definitely the practice of child marriage shall be opposed. But as tribes go for such marriages as part of their customary practices, first they should be given awareness before taking legal action against them.

It is stated clearly in the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, that this Act is not applicable for the Scheduled Tribes. Many high courts gave ruling in the past that the marriage, divorce and inheritance among Scheduled Tribes shall be governed by their customary practices. But still many judicial and police officers are not aware of such specialities of the tribes and do not approve their customary marriage practices. That is why even now the marriage between tribes and non-tribes end up in various legal tangles.

Pertinent observations and findings

Some of the observations of the researcher based on the analysis of primary data gathered from the field are the following. They are leading to the findings of this study.

The partners of tribal unwed mothers are from both within the same community, other tribal communities or non-tribal communities. Generally the affair starts when girls meet their partners in the work place, neighbourhood, educational institutions etc. Often both parties get attracted to each other and develop a desire to get married. In many occasions the male partner give promises to the girl that he will marry her in due course of time even though often such promises are forgotten. Some of the cunning males use this promise as a premise to attract the simple, unassuming girls. They sometimes are already married with children, who wilfully deceive the girls. The girls on the other hand easily fall prey to such hollow promises. Once they get close to each other then the males persuade them to have sexual contacts. Some of the girls revealed to the investigators that

they were not aware of the relation between sexual intercourse and pregnancy. As many of the girls are in their teen ages they have no scientific or practical knowledge about such things. Biologically they are in their prime age of physical development but at the same time mentally not mature enough to become a mother. Cultural taboos prevent them to discuss matters on sex with their own mothers or other senior female members in the family.

Mothers of some of the subjects are unwed mothers and often their daughters consider this as something occurring as quite natural in their community. However, they have also pointed out that in the current society the unwed mothers are targets of social stigma unlike in the past when tribal customary practices were not much influenced by the non-tribal value system and the laws of the country.

It is also evident that for most of the unwed mothers what happened in their life is more like an accident and they were not prepared to face it. At the same time these innocent girls got the support of their family, especially mothers. In some cases there was pressure from the male partners to abort the foetus. But none of these girls opted for that. On the other hand they delivered their child and brought them up with their own effort supported often by their mother. Some of the subjects also admitted that they never know where to go for abortion. One subject explained that when she made up her mind to go for abortion it was already late and it could not be done. Many of them now live for their child and their ambition is to give good education to their child which will help them to become good human beings. They want to give a bright future to their child.

Almost all the subjects interviewed reported that their delivery was in the local government hospitals except one or two elderly ones. This shows the awareness among these women regarding the need for medical care at the time of childbirth. Moreover, they were also getting medicines for themselves and their children in the later stages. All of them took immunisation for their children also. It shows the influence of Anganwadi

workers, tribal promoters, ASHA workers etc who generally communicate the need of immunisation among the tribal communities.

All the subjects except one are now earning a living through wage labour. This indicates their poor financial condition and they find it difficult to make both ends meet. Their family members are also generally manual labourers so that they have no capacity to support the subjects. The amount of money they get as wage is not sufficient to satisfy their needs. As manual labourers in the nearby plantations or in the land of the local non-tribal landlords there is no regular availability of work. Especially during the rainy season there is no work for many weeks. The agricultural sector in Wayanad district is also going through a dull phase as there is no good price for the agricultural commodities and pest infestation is also common. The farmers are also adversely affected by the climatic changes and the attack of wild animals. Therefore the land owners try to reduce the expenditure on wage labour as they themselves are struggling to continue.

Most serious problem of these women is related to livelihood as all of them hail from very poor families. Many of them have own land and a house in it. They got such house plots as part of some housing projects of the government for the scheduled tribes. But the area of land is often four or five cents so that they cannot cultivate anything there. Some of the subjects wanted to rear cows or goats; but the lack of space does not allow them to have it. Practically they have no income from their land. This makes their position really vulnerable as they have to fully depend on the income from wage labour.

There is a mixed reaction regarding the health status of the unwed mothers and their children. As mentioned above they have got admitted in the hospitals at the time of delivery. However, the other benefits normally received by the pregnant women were not available for most of them. Some of them who eloped with their male partners were with them in the early months of their pregnancy away from their families. Therefore, they did not get the support of their mothers. Their partners were either not capable of giving adequate care to them or deserted them. Some others who were living in their family tried

to cover up the whole affair and kept the matter secret in the early months of pregnancy. Only after the bodily changes were noticed by other family members they had to disclose about it. In such cases they were not getting any special food or proper rest in the early months of pregnancy which were essential for a carrying woman. Mother of some of the subjects was upset and angry after knowing about the pregnancy and they did not give any support to their own daughters. Being wage labourers some mothers had no financial capacity to provide special nutritious food to their daughters. Anyway some of the subjects were well supported by their mothers and they got proper care during pregnancy and after childbirth. But most others were not fortunate to get special food and rest after delivery. In some families they were neglected and separate living arrangements were made for them in the corner of the house. Same is the situation of their children and only few of them received nutritious food and proper care. A positive finding is that all the children received immunisation at the proper intervals.

The unwed mothers interviewed who are now in their middle age reported many health problems for them. Their ailments are both physical and psychological. Many of them have back pain, head ache, chronic fatigue and poor memory and so on. This affects their capacity to engage in wage labour regularly. At the same time they are not very particular in visiting hospital for getting treatment. According to them they have no time to go to hospital as they will lose the wage of one day. They are not ready to visit the medical camps organized in their locality as lady doctors are often not available there. They have inhibition to disclose their health problems before the male doctors which may involve bodily examination. To a certain extent the subjects depend on traditional tribal medicine men and home remedies that are available to them free of cost.

Some are affected by mental depression. They are upset about what happened in their life. They have a tendency to compare their condition with that of their peers. When they find that their friends lead a happy married life and have good employment they blame themselves for what happened in their life. They have no hope that their situation will improve in future. They have anxiety also about the future of their child.

The most pressing need of the unwed mothers is related to their livelihood. Family of unwed mothers can be treated as incomplete family as here the mother alone is responsible for the upbringing of the child. As they are the sole bread winners of the family, they require a steady income from a regular job or the income from some self employment project. Only with the availability of such a source of livelihood they can bring up their child in a proper manner and also to satisfy their essential needs. But they are least satisfied with the government projects for the benefit of unwed mothers. Some of the self employment projects and craft centres started by the state government in Wayanad district for the unwed mothers are not functioning well.

The *Snehasparsam* pension scheme introduced by the Kerala Social Security Mission is one of the main support systems for the tribal unwed mothers. The applications for this scheme is verified and forwarded by the Community Development Project Officer of the Social Justice Department and the Regional Director of the Social Security Mission finally sanctions the pension. However, there is much delay in completing the process once somebody applies for this. Moreover, allotment of funds by the State Government to this scheme is irregular so that there is interruption in receiving the pension. Often money of many months is available as lump sum manner. The poor unwed mothers face serious financial problems because of the irregular availability of pension. Some of the unwed mothers are not aware of the *Snehasparsam* pension scheme, so that they do not apply for the same. Some of the prospective applicants are discouraged by the formalities attached with the submission of application as many certificates are to be produced along with the application form. An unwed mother will be removed from the beneficiary list if she gets married or completed the age of 65 years.

Many of the subjects reported that they got support from the ICDS *Anganwadi* functioning in their locality. Both the mother and child got nutritious food from the *Anganwadi* which is a great relief for them. Moreover, the unwed mothers can also leave their children in the *Anganwadi* when they go for wage labour. The ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers and tribal promoters are other agents who can support the

unwed mothers. There is a mixed reaction regarding the assistance received from them. Some of the subjects acknowledged their support especially during pregnancy and after child birth. The volunteers accompanied the subjects to hospital while they were admitted there for delivery and some others told them about the immunisation of the child. On the other hand some subjects revealed that they did not get any support from them.

Yet another problem is that these unwed mothers are also targets of social stigma and even if they wish to remarry it is difficult for them to find a suitable partner. Often the fellow members of the community accuse them as persons with loose morals who engage in illicit relations to satisfy their uncontrolled sexual desires. The situation was not this much serious in the past as the traditional tribal value system was more permissive regarding the sexual affairs among members within the community. But the influx of non-tribal value system changed that scenario and the educated youngsters consider unwed motherhood as a shameful phenomenon. They also know that this is not permitted by the law of the country. However, even now there are very few persons coming forward to raise legal complaints against the men who are responsible. Many of such men are from non-tribal communities. Customary life cycle rituals performed at the time of pregnancy are denied to the unwed mothers as mark of social disapproval. However, the children born of such illicit relation are not discriminated in any such way by the fellow members of the community.

Some of the subjects reported that they put up complaint in local police station and Child Line against the person responsible for the pregnancy. However, no action was taken against the accused person and police officials were with the offenders and they intimidated the tribes for initiating such action against the non-tribal people involved. The police officers often ask for evidence for the involvement of the person concerned which the tribal girls fail to provide. Due to such negative experiences the victims are discouraged to seek redressal of their grievances which is an advantage for the perpetrators.

Some of the subjects disclosed that the women have limited freedom in their community. The decisions regarding marriage are taken by the parents or other elders without seeking the opinion of the girl who is to get married. Sometimes the bridegroom may be a drunkard or a lazy person. If the girl has a love affair often she may not have the freedom to disclose it before the parents. That is why some girls prefer to elope with the partner which again ends up in failure.

Large number of Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) is functioning in Wayanad district. Many of them are operating in the field of tribal development. At the same time all the subjects save one reported that they did not get any support from such organizations. This is an important finding which emphasizes the need for NGO presence in this very crucial area.

“As per media reports in Thirunelli area there are active rackets that provide tribal girls to resorts as per requirement. As part of the growing importance of tourism industry in the state number of resorts are coming up in Wayanad where the major attraction is its natural beauty and clean environment. If the media reports are correct the exploitation of tribal girls in the resorts shall be curbed and the culprits must be booked. Otherwise this practice also will result in more number of tribal unwed mothers” (Meena Nair, 2014).

Unwed mothers mostly depend upon and are supported by ICDS *Anganwadi* workers. They get nutritious food from them during pregnancy and lactating period and for their child from the *Anganwadis*. Children are also getting their pre-school education from there. Moreover, those unwed mothers who apply for the *Snehasparsham* pension scheme also do that with the support of *Anganwadi* workers.

Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) had initiated a project for addressing the issues of unwed mothers, which is in pipeline, with a fund of Rs 25 lakhs to each panchayat. The fund is from Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP), and asked the village panchayats to submit proposals. No further follow up is being done.

Many of the unwed mothers are skilled and some are qualified and have school education, but the situation did not allow them to pursue with their skills. Many are ready to acquire a skill and work to earn money. If there is some scheme exclusively for unwed mothers, they will be able to use the same. In the present investigation, the researcher met some subjects who know stitching and wish to get some regular employment in a shop; but could not get it. Some others want to rear cows or goats but have no money to purchase the same. Besides they do not have enough land to construct a cow shed. In such occasions they remain as agricultural labourers with a meagre amount as wage. The job in the agriculture sector is seasonal in nature so that they do not get regular employment. There is no work during the rainy season when they mainly depend upon the rice obtained from the ration shops free of cost. But as some of them do not have ration card they cannot enjoy this benefit too.

The unwed mothers are not active in NREGS and *Kudumbashree* activities, because they and their children are looked down upon by others when they are in a group. The antagonism is high from family members and other relatives. Here the impact of social stigma can be found. As the action of an unwed mother is against social values and norms they are not supported by the society. So, they generally try to keep themselves away from the public gaze. But at the same time they are forced to go for manual labour outside their home as there is nobody to support them.

Many of the unwed mothers do not want protection from the State, since the protection, usually is making them live together in a destitute home or an orphanage. They do not like such institutional rehabilitation as it affects their freedom. In their own settlement even though they may have problems of poverty and discrimination from the fellow members and uncertainty about their own future and the future of their child, still they have freedom to lead a life of their own. This is the place familiar for them right from their birth whereas in the institutions they are forced to live with strangers from other castes, tribes and communities.

Even though many of them have skills in tailoring, driving, dairying, agriculture related activities and all aspects of paddy cultivation they cannot convert that to an employment opportunity, due to lack of job opportunities in their own locality. They have no capacity to move into other places in search of job. In addition they do not have sufficient money to buy vehicle or cow. They are also devoid of support and motivation from the part of relatives and the public. On the other hand people have many reasons for criticizing them for their failures.

Tribal unwed mother need assistance to acquire even the basic rights like ration card of their own. Also they are in need of legal assistance and that should be provided. As per a survey conducted by Kerala institute of Local Administration (KILA), 24,289 tribal families in Kerala do not hold ration cards (2011). Present study also shows that the unwed mothers and their children are included along with other family members in those families having ration cards. Therefore, often when the unwed mothers apply for some benefits from the government there are technical problems as they do not have a separate ration card of their own.

Another major area which needs attention is the health of unwed mothers and their children. Health department mainly reach to these women through ICDS *Anganwadis*. According to the survey of KILA (2011) mentioned above as much as 49 percent of the tribal houses in Kerala do not have toilets, and half of the population of Scheduled Tribes is deprived of pure drinking water. These findings of the survey indicate the gravity of the problems existing in the tribal areas.

Some of the tribal women had to go for work outside their hamlet and sometimes outside their area itself. Such migrations for work largely increased the chances for motherhood out of wedlock. In some cases, the women fall prey to those men who support them financially, since they are in need of money. This also fosters sexual exploitation. After receiving money they cannot resist the advances made by men from whom they received financial support.

Majority of unwed mothers come from mixed settlements rather than single tribe/traditional hamlets. The mixing of tribes is caused mainly in the rehabilitated settlements where the tribal families are given land by the revenue or forest department as part of resettling them. In the resettlement colonies house plots are allotted to beneficiaries based on their status as tribes. Their community-vice difference is not considered. The resettlement packages always shattered the hamlet structure and shook the tribal ties, which to a great extent contributed in creating and promoting several social problems in the tribal belts, including unwed motherhood. In such colonies the control of traditional tribal leaders gets weakened and the members of the community get more anonymity regarding their activities. The unique social structure of each tribal community with their customary rules and regulations, pattern of family, marriage, value system etc get disorganized in this altered circumstances.

“The Paniya community underwent long years of slavery in the past and they were semi nomadic, moving according to the place of work. Permanent residence is a recent experience for the Paniya tribe. The nomadic nature and the flexibility prevailed in the marriage ties among them, still allow the Paniya women to get engaged with men, inside and outside the colonies, easily. They mingle with men freely. The Paniya women were more free in soul and were and still are less bothered about the society outside their colony and their people. This attitude is exploited by men” (Nair Meena, 2014).

Education

The educational status of the subjects of study was very low, mostly illiterate, majority having schooling below 5th standard, and a minority studied up to 10th standard. There was nobody with college education. Many of them were drop outs due to various reasons. The parents also are generally ignorant about the need of giving education to their wards. For some of them the schools were at a distance so that it was very difficult and dangerous for them to reach the school especially if their houses are located inside deep forest. Often the locality is frequented by wild animals so that it is not safe for the children to walk alone through such paths. In such occasions the company of the parents

is essential; but as most of the parents are manual labourers they have no time to accompany their children to school.

Some parents are unwilling to send their girl children to schools and hostels after they reach the age of puberty. Parents are afraid that their daughters may be sexually exploited by the outsiders. They also have some idea about the atrocities against girls in the state from the visual media.

Children in their young age are not aware of the importance of getting education so that they engage in play and remain happy in their households when parents do not force them to go to school. Only when they are grown up they realize the problems of illiteracy.

The girls who are either illiterate or educationally backward have little exposure to the media and outside world. Often the only mass media to which they are exposed are films and television. In the television they generally watch the serials, movies and such entertainment programmes and not the news or any other serious items with some educative content. Usually in the films and serials love affairs, pre-marital and extra-marital sex, molestation of girls, illegal abortion, violence against women especially by in-laws, dowry related harassment, etc are the popular and regular contents. The girls who are exposed to them are generally influenced by it and they often develop a tendency to imitate them. The unscrupulous men in the locality take advantage of these naive girls and allure them with false promises.

The educational backwardness of tribal communities is also reinforced by the negative influence on it by the experiences of those from the community who remain jobless even after completing their education. Hundreds of graduates and undergraduates among tribes are jobless (KILA, 2011). It is a de-motivation for the youngsters and they feel that it is meaningless to get educated as there is no reward for it in the form of a job. Often those who are fortunate to get job, especially in the government sector, leave the community and settle at a distance from their place of origin. Some such persons also marry from outside. After getting settled in life in the midst of non tribal society they consider their

tribal identity as a liability for them. Therefore, their influence on the community is minimal so that they cannot motivate the youngsters in their community by being role models to them.

For those youngsters who go to school regularly there is lack of many services, which are essential for achieving success in getting a good job especially in backward districts like Wayanad, Idukki or Palakkad. There is great need of career guidance for the tribal students. As these children are often the first generation learners their parents have no capacity to guide them in the selection of right courses for them. In Kerala at present there is stiff competition for getting admission in the professional courses. Only those students who attend the coaching classes have a better chance to get admission for such courses like medicine and engineering. But the tribal students coming from the poor families of backward regions have no access to such coaching centres so that for them getting admission in professional courses remains as an unfulfilled dream. Students from forward tribal communities get a major share of such seats reserved for scheduled tribes. Parents of many of them are already employed in government sector so that they have capacity to give good education and coaching for their wards.

Pregnancy

The investigator could find out from the case studies that the pregnancy of the girls/women is causing them much more problems than in the past. “In the past, the pregnancy out of wedlock was not met with so much antagonism. There are traditional ways to tackle the issue like giving compensation to the girls’ family from the man’s side, etc. Also the tribe lived as a unit and the children were not the sole responsibility of the mother. But today, the situation has changed. The mother and her family are becoming the only people responsible. When the man denies or elopes from the situation, the girl/woman is left to fight the situation alone. The family too seem reluctant to accept the unwed mothers. Hence the experience of pregnancy is a very critical, painful and at times fatal and dangerous one” (Meena Nair, 2014). These changes are mainly due to the interaction between Paniyans and the nontribal communities. The value system followed

in the non tribal communities is now getting imported to the tribal communities so that their traditional way of life is now getting fashioned as per the model of non tribal society.

Some of the subjects revealed that they thought of aborting the child, but do not know the way to approach the hospital. In the early stages of pregnancy the young girls often conceal the matter from everybody and later they are forced to disclose the same to others after the onset of physical changes that cannot be any more hid from the notice of others. In such advanced stages of pregnancy if at all the girls wish to have abortion it will not be permitted by law. Therefore, no hospital will offer such services to them. In such occasions they also thought of getting the abortion done by traditional medicine women. There are such incidences happened in the past where the mother succumbed to death due to the primitive ways of abortion employed. Other vice such women who approached the traditional midwives developed serious health problems that lasted for life.

The pregnancy period of the unwed mother in general is one of pain, ridicule, bad name and poverty. There are some cases where the mother stood with the daughter and looked after her, but mostly the girl/woman faces a negative attitude from the family members, members of her tribe and outsiders. They are not receiving traditional health care practices which they used to get at the time of pregnancy, neither any care from the hospitals. The *Anganwadi* workers are the only personnel helping them in such situations, giving them nutritious food.

Food

In the past Paniyans used to collect food items from the forest in the form of various tubers, nuts, leafy vegetables etc. Moreover they used to hunt the birds and small animals for meat. From the forest streams and rivers they also got fish. In this way the tribes had all sources for a balanced diet. In addition to the food items available from the nature they also used to cultivate paddy, millets, plantains and vegetables which formed a part of their daily diet. Millets like ragi (*Eleusine coracana*) was the staple food of many tribes of Kerala which was very nutritious. Paniyans also used to rear fowls and cows in their

households so that they get egg and milk. It was also a source of meat. The Paniyan tribes used to take a lot of wild tubers and leafy vegetables as food. In the past they never purchased food from shops outside their hamlet except salt and red chilly as per the feedback from the older persons of the community. Thus they had the fortune to consume unpolluted food available from the nature. But in the current society there is drastic change in their dietary habits. Due to the shrinking area of forest they cannot get any food items from the forest and now they fully depend on the ration shops and other provision shops for their food. There are also restrictions on the collection of food items from the forest imposed by the Forest Department. Moreover many of them now live outside the forest. Any cultivation inside the forest is now prohibited by law. Due to the shortage of money tribes cannot afford purchasing many nutritious food items from the market. Therefore, they are satisfied with essential items like rice, sugar, oil, salt and some vegetables. They cannot afford to purchase milk or eggs. These changes in their dietary pattern contributed malnutrition among them. Besides, by imitating the non tribes they are also now interested to packed food items which are expensive and of poor nutritive value. The addiction to alcoholic beverages by both men and women is another serious problem affecting the nutritional status of the Paniyans.

In the past they were also well informed of a range of herbal medicines too. These medicines were obtained from the forest free of cost. The use of herbal medicine was often coupled with some religious or magical rituals that enhanced the efficacy of these medicines. The shrinking forest land and fallow land, forest laws, etc minimize their chances of collecting these items at present. Thus like the non tribes the Paniyans also now depend upon the services of hospitals outside their community which involves spending of money. Therefore, often they postpone their visits to hospital due to lack of money and time. This sometimes aggravates their health problems.

The food they take at present mostly is the ration supplied from ration shops, which is very low in nutrient content. The hotel food they get in cheap price also has become part of their diet. All this has lowered their physical well being in the recent time.

This situation turns critical at the time of pregnancy, and most of the unwed mothers receive little care and support from the family as others do not approve what happened to her. Biologically it is a vulnerable situation for them when they deserve better care and nutritious food. Many of the unwed mothers have acute back pain, stomach pain, hormonal issues, etc after delivery. Also the children born are undernourished. The low birth weight of their infants is common which adversely affects their later physical development. There is no study or review to indicate the health status of the unwed mother done so far, but their present health condition is an indicator of their pregnancy care. It is also a context pointing out how the inherent social stigma against the deeds of unwed mothers is translated into actions inimical to them. The most cruel aspect of the situation is that the foetus quite unknowingly also becomes a victim of the troubles faced by his/her mother. His/her life chances are also determined to a certain extent during those very early months of existence in the womb.

Attitude towards Unwed Mothers

The attitude towards unwed mothers from various corners is of varying nature, but the common factor we can observe is that they are all antagonistic towards the victim. The attitude towards the Paniya single mothers from the family is, to the surprise and great concern of the investigator, equally antagonistic as anybody else in the community. It can be noticed that the family members themselves are targets of social stigma due to the presence of an unwed mother in their household. When the members of the family are ridiculed by neighbours and others with whom they come into contact they direct that anger to these unfortunate women. Quite ironically the man who is responsible for pregnancy often remains invisible and if at all his identity is known still he can evade the gaze of others to a certain extent. Moreover, he is not handicapped by any of the biological problems faced by his counterpart.

In the Paniya community, the nomadic nature and flexible relationships that existed in the past was now a faint memory only. “The woman who got pregnant out of wedlock is now treated as a deviant in their own house. The investigator could see Paniya women with small children living in one side of the house, in a dark and shabby area, uncared by

others of the household. The members of the household want the mother and the child to move away from the house. They are saying that it is a shame for them. This deserted woman may not have a ration card of her own or any other resources, like land, house, etc. Hence, her position is one of total alienation and dependence” (Nair Meena, 2014). Attitude of neighbours, people outside the hamlet, authorities, etc are also not positive. All of them represent different sections of the society and as the action of unwed mother is designated as a deviant one none of them are in a position to support her. The Paniya woman is struggling to find some support from any of them but is constantly failing to get the same.

Even in the place of work the unwed mothers experience isolation and discrimination. Working in the paddy field is a common job for the Paniyan women. However, the work in paddy field is of collective nature where close interaction and mutual support among workers is essential. The unwed mothers, who are sort of ‘excluded’, often feel unable to work with others. They are not included as one among them.

The current livelihood status of the tribal unwed mothers is highly at risk. They are alienated from their own community, and from outsiders they are already alienated. The status of an unwed mother further aggravates this alienation. The investigator could gather the information from the respondents that they are reluctant to participate in MGNREGS and *Kudumbashree* in general; still those are the only livelihood options easily available to them. Road or building construction sites are open for them, but many of the respondents opined that those are also sites of further sexual exploitation. Hence the livelihood of the unwed mothers is an area of real concern.

Livelihood: Natural resources and survival

The tribal communities have lost their traditional resources and livelihood pattern due to several reasons. This situation has affected their survival to a great extent. Paniya community, especially Paniya women, heavily relied on work in the paddy fields in the past, since they were the major chunk of labourers in the paddy fields of Wayanad. The

shrinking paddy fields and the rush of workers from outside the district and the state have decreased the work days of the Paniya tribes in general.

Paniya women usually do not work in the tea plantations, since the work demands continuous labour. They prefer work at the coffee plantations since the work is seasonal. But due to mechanization in the coffee plantation sector, the women lost much of their major work days in the same.

The major occupations of the Paniya women in the past were

1. Work in the paddy fields
2. Planting cardamom, ginger, pepper
3. Harvesting coffee seeds
4. De husking areca nut

The larger changes in the economy has altered the lives of the Paniya tribes too, especially Paniya women. The only skill many respondents have was related to agriculture. Almost all the Paniya women, except the school going girls, know all the work in the paddy field, from tending the soil to de husking the paddy. But as an economic activity the paddy fields underwent many changes in the past years. Mechanization, decreasing area of fields, migrant workers, etc are some major reasons. The cultivation is also adversely affected by the attack of wild animals which is a threat against both human lives and property.

The major skill possessed by the Paniya women is in the agricultural sector, and the deterioration of the same has affected them adversely as stated above. This caused increased migration for labour and which in turn paved way for increase in the number of unwed mothers.

In the absence of familiar means of livelihood, the unwed mothers resort to borrowing money from outsiders in needs and this is getting them to trouble. Financial debts also causes further sexual exploitation of these women, for when they were unable to repay, they are offered other choices. One of the subjects of this study revealed that she knows an unwed mother who now houses her money lender in her home. She borrowed ten

thousand rupees from him for hospital expenses and later couldn't repay on time. The interest rates shot up and the amount became so high that the woman could never think of repaying. She lives in a resettled area along with other tribal families away from her own people. She has nothing to sell. Hence she accepted his offer that he will 'look after' her. For the last one year, he is with her. This man has wife and children back home in Kannur. She doesn't know till when he will remain with her.

As Vineeta Menon writes in the introduction to the collection of essays titled "Environment and Tribes in India- Resource conflicts and adaptations", "the role of environment in securing subsistence and sustainable development is crucial. The more fragile the environment is the more are the subsistence conflicts and the challenges to sustainable development. An environment or eco system and there by culture, becomes fragile on account of various factors ranging from climatic change, over population induced by migration, changes in land use or livelihood practices, technological changes, over exploitation, depletion and destruction of resources, etc" (Nair Meena, 2014). Subjects interviewed in the present study as well as their fellow members in the tribal community are generally impoverished people with lack of access to resources. Landlessness and/or the possession of only meagre area of land are the major reasons for their poverty which makes them susceptible to the exploitation of non tribes. Illiteracy and educational backwardness is another handicap for the tribes that make their social capital very insignificant. Limited representation in public bureaucracy and poor participation in the political processes also make their position in society vulnerable. Thus the deficiencies of the tribes are multidimensional. Here again the condition of the women is more pathetic than men as in other societies.

Well known anthropologist Marvin Harris had noted as early as in 1970s, even hunting gathering and agricultural societies lapsed into endemic warfare and gender violence when their resource bases were depleted and over stretched. An ecological system under stress renders people vulnerable. Already vulnerable groups like the indigenous/tribal people, women and children, the old and the disabled are the worst sufferers of such environmental stress.

Migration of non-tribal people into tribal areas has been one known factor for resource conflicts in tribal areas that have pushed tribal people in groups or in smaller fragmented groups or as individual beings, to migrate to other areas seasonally or permanently, stressing out their culture, society, families and individual lives. Even though such migrations from the fringe areas of the forest to the deep forest was possible in the past, currently it is restricted by the stringent forest Acts. The forest has clear boundaries and the movement inside the forest is fully controlled by the strict surveillance by the officials of the forest department. Developmental interventions and administrative interventions of the State too have caused varieties of ecological stresses. Here, some cope well, but some fail.

Many tribes in Wayanad district depend on Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) like honey, wild gooseberry, fungi, medicinal herbs, etc for livelihood. But even those are gradually changing. The availability of NTFPs is becoming less. They understand that they need to earn cash so they go to work in coffee plantation. But they need more employment opportunities. For them to embrace the changes and adapt to the alternative livelihoods, close and intensive support would be essential. It is not only for technical support but also for the household management and life planning. Tribal Promoter who is supposed to play such role is not adequately trained and do not have skills/knowledge to provide such support for the communities.

Social security schemes/ *Snehasparsam*/widow pension

Another way that contributes to the survival of the unwed mother is social security measures from the part of the state government. The investigator could understand from the *Anganwadi* workers, tribal promoters and Sevinis of Mahila samakhya, that there are several unwed mothers who are not receiving these benefits. The reasons are many, like

1. Their ignorance about the existence of such a scheme
2. Negligence from the part of the development agents
3. Illiteracy – Unable to read and fill the form
4. Not willing to get branded as unwed mother

5. Many of them are willing to apply for widow pension but reluctant to apply for *Snehasparsam*, a scheme exclusively for unwed mothers

Liabilities

The liabilities of most unwed mothers constitute debt to money lenders or loan from *Kudumbashree* SHGs. Most of them try to manage the situation without borrowing money since they can't find a source to repay. But in critical situations like hospital treatment, educational needs of children, etc they are forced to borrow. As they do not have any assets to pledge it is not possible for them to get loans from banks or cooperative societies. When they get loans from money lenders the interest rate is high and conditions of repayment are stringent. These liabilities are creating many problems to the unwed mothers. As noted earlier sometimes the money lender may sexually exploit the women when they are not able to repay the loan.

Assets:

Land – Many of the subjects of this study reported that they have no ownership of land. Most of the Paniya lands are owned collectively. The land will be in the name of an ancestor who may be deceased or surviving. All others live in two or three cents of land. But due to the social discrimination against unwed mothers they are often denied of their share in the property. Motherhood out of wedlock is now becoming another reason for denying the right to ancestral land for the women.

On the other hand some of the unwed mothers got land from their parents as they were the only daughters of their parents. Some others got land as part of the housing projects for the scheduled tribes sponsored by the state government.

The resettled tribal land is given on the revenue land where no ownership is defined. Sometimes, politically infused land occupation by the tribal communities in the revenue or forest land happens in Wayanad. In both cases, they do not have access to adequate land on which they can depend upon for their livelihood and live comfortably.

Landlessness among tribes is very grave and becoming more and more complicated in Wayanad. No authority seems to have any solution for this issue. Forest Department implements projects for resettlement of tribal people settled in the core zone of the reserved forests. The families are provided with land outside the zone and are resettled. Ten lakhs rupees are expended for one family. But for landless tribes outside the forest area, no satisfactory solution is available. In this available gap, political parties are mobilizing tribes to encroach land and settle there. Arrests and protests are still going on in this regard. All major political parties have their tribal wing that organizes the agitations for land. Political parties use such agitations in order to strengthen their base among tribes who are treated as a vote bank.

Some parts of land are being transferred by the tribes to general category people, such as Christians and Muslims. Houses of Christians and other general category people are rather big and permanent. One can easily identify such houses. However, transferring the tribal land to the members of other communities is not legally permitted. Thus, any of the transaction to transfer the ownership of the tribal land would be considered illegal. But such things are happening and the land title of such land is undefined.

Some tribes already living on such revenue land may also seek another plot in another area. When a protest occurs, they take it as an opportunity to gain more land. Some tribal people may have plots in different colonies. They seek various options to get land mainly to provide some of it to their children.

House – Only a few of the unwed mothers own a house. Such houses are often constructed as part of the housing projects of the state government for scheduled tribes. Others live with their family a life of an outcaste. They have no land to build their own house. In Wayanad, the tribal people have been motivated by the political parties to settle in patches of revenue land where no particular ownership is defined. Some have title deeds but many do not. Some have ration cards, some have not. Most of them go for work in coffee plantations. Panchayat also established water supply facilities which

provide around two hours of water supply through house hold connection. Electricity connections to the household are also available but often they cannot afford it. Therefore, many houses do not have the connection. Solar power was introduced in other places which are remote where no household connection is available. But the maintenance of the solar panel has been a problem. Once it is damaged, there is no chance of maintenance.

Majority of the unwed mothers are in possession of no assets. Very few possess land and a house. They have very meagre material possessions with them, like, some mats, minimum number of vessels, clothes, etc. Gold ornaments and savings in bank are unthinkable in their current situation.

Skills

The investigator could find several skilled unwed mothers among the Paniya community. Almost all are experts in any aspect of paddy cultivation. Several of the subjects are educated up to matriculation and some are even above that. Many showed interest in learning nursing. There are some who have passed short term courses in tailoring, bag and umbrella making, some have driving license and is skilled in auto rickshaw driving, etc. In spite of the possession of such skills most of them remain at home as unemployed or go for any manual labour that may not require any special skills. Being unwed mothers this happens as they are victims of social discrimination. If they get some opportunity, definitely they would have come up in their life. In the present study one subject who was trained got job in a hospital with the support of an NGO and she performed well in her career and gives good education to her child.

Psychological and emotional Problems

A major area which is untouched and is critical is the psychological and emotional problems faced by the tribal unwed mothers. The current situation of the unwed mothers of Paniya tribe is very pathetic. In the past, there was not much antagonism towards a woman who delivers a child out of wedlock. But today, the unwed mother is considered as a culprit and driven to the fringe of the household. The other family members seemed to like her move away from home. In the outside world also, she is not welcome. Many of

the respondents opined that they were reluctant to go for MG NREGS work because of the indifference from the part of the colleagues. Hence these women are left with no one to share their emotional burdens. This vacuum has affected many unwed mothers and they are now susceptible to several psychological disorders. The major mental issues they shared are the following;

- Loneliness
- Self dejection
- Feeling of desertion
- Feel as a misfit
- Considering oneself as an excluded
- Negative feeling towards the child
- Negative feeling towards men
- Negative feeling towards the world

Adding to this is the stress and strain they experience while trying to earn a living of their own. The competition that is prevailing in the market affects these women most since they are disadvantaged to the fringe. The lack of association with their kith and kin, lack of entertainment, etc aggravates the situation. Hence, the deteriorating psychological health of the unwed mothers is a matter of real concern and an area which needs immediate intervention.

Social Participation

The lower position of the unwed mothers in the society is reflected in their participation in the societal activities too. Most of the subjects reported that they avoid even going to *Oorukoottam* and *Grama sabha*, not to speak of other entertainments. They feel rejected everywhere and hence can never be active in those gatherings. They are afraid of ridicule and negative comments from others who participate in such meetings. They find themselves helpless to answer the hostile questions posed by others. Hence they are unable to ascertain themselves and get the rightful share of the governmental benefits too. As a result of their alienation, the unwed mothers avoid participation in

- tribal festivals
- festivals outside the settlement, and
- cinema

This non participation further alienates them from the society and makes them prey to further exploitation. Participation of the unwed mothers in the general societal and particular cultural events can be boosted only with keen and continuous awareness generation among themselves and the wider society. Social activists, NGOs, government departments, etc should be made to play an active role in this area to make it a success.

Benefits and Support

This study brings out the fact that the tribal unwed mothers are receiving very menial benefits and no support either from people around them or from the authorities. As they belong to the most marginalized community they have already so many other inherent disadvantages which are aggravated by the problem of unwed motherhood.

***Snehasparsam* pension scheme**

Even though government has formulated a scheme of monetary support of Rs 1000/- to the unwed mothers, the number of unwed mothers availing this support is extremely low. There are only around 90 *Snehasparsam* beneficiaries in Wayanad district where there are more than 300 unwed mothers officially and much more unofficially. This is due to several reasons including their educational backwardness, illiteracy, low mobility, alienation from outside society, ignorance about government schemes, poor performance of the Tribal Promoters, ICDS *Anganwadi* workers, Police, etc. Some of the victims do not want to avail this benefit as they are not interested to be labelled as unwed mothers.

Widow pension

Some of the unwed mothers are getting widow pension. The ICDS *Anganwadi* workers are helping them to get the widow pension. But many of them are not availing the same.

Scheduled Tribe Development Department (STDD)

Even though the majority of unwed mothers belong to the tribal community, the STDD has not formulated any programmes or projects for addressing this issue. The amount

budgeted for the benefits of unwed mothers were reimbursed due to lack of plans, say the ITDP officials.

Support from Others

Other benefits are also menial which include support from some NGOs, religious organisations, and such voluntary agencies who supply grains, clothes, medical aid, etc, but that is not on a regular basis and very rarely only. Their activities are often based on a charity approach so that they are unable to promote the well being of unwed mothers in a stable manner.

Family Support

Unlike in the past, the Paniya and other tribes do not give much support to the woman who conceives a child out of wedlock. In the past, conception before marriage was considered patiently and supported by the family, whether the man responsible supports the woman or not. But now, the tribal family also has undergone changes. Their resources are scarce now, mostly landless, houseless, etc. Hence, at present, the Paniya families do not seem to accommodate the unwed mothers and the child/children at home. Among the interviewed, only two women were supported by their mothers; but averted by other members of the family, especially by married siblings. In a way they are also forced to share the shame due to the action of the unwed mother of their family. That is why they get angry with her.

Neighbours and Friends

As with the family members, neighbours and friends too extend minimum support to the single mothers. They are also influenced by the general attitude prevailing in the society towards the unwed mothers.

Social activists and Local NGOs

Social activists and Non Governmental Organisations in the vicinity do take up the issue of the single mothers at times, but none of them has produced any lasting results in the life of them. Without understanding the cultural peculiarities and the basic issues of the victims, the agencies propose superficial activities to alleviate their problems. Supply of

ration, medical support, etc was extended to the single mothers by some of the agencies, but that was not lasting.

Kudumbashree

Many of the single mothers whom the investigator met reported that they were reluctant to go and participate in the *Kudumbashree* activities. They said that the other members who are neighbours and relatives of them are unwilling to accommodate them. Generally Paniya women are not very welcome in the SHGs, and when it comes to Paniya single mothers, it is the worst.

They are also reluctant to go to MG NREGS, saying that it is a group work and they feel alienated there. Also the other members did not welcome the presence of these women in the place of work. All these drive them away from participating in the work.

ICDS (*Integrated Child Development Services*)

Many of the single mothers said that the only support they get is from the ICDS *Anganwadi* workers, helpers and supervisors. The *Anganwadi* officials were very particular that the single mothers get all their due from the part of the Government. They are the officials concerned with the enrolment of the single mothers with the Kerala Social Security Mission for them to get the pension, *Snehasparsam* that is given to single mothers. Also the ICDS personnel help them in getting their benefits from Panchayat, etc.

Vana Samrakshana Samiti (VSS)/ Eco Development Committee (EDC)

The investigator couldn't see any involvement from the part of VSS/EDC, in support of the Single Mothers.

ASHA workers

The ASHA workers have involvement in many of the tribal colonies, in general. In connection with the single mothers, their involvement is minimal. The single women are suffering from several ailments and hence, they are in very high health risk. But the involvement of the health officials and official structures like Primary Health Centre, etc were very less as far as they are concerned.

Tribal promoters and Committed Social Workers

In some areas, the investigator could observe that the tribal promoters are involved creatively in this issue, but there is a greater cultural problem in this context. The promoters, who are non Paniya, will not be involved with the issues of Paniya women. The Paniya tribe still suffer a sort of social alienation from other tribes and this will reflect in this context also. The committed social workers are unable to involve in any way in the single mother issue, since their roles and duties in general are not clear. They are a potential bunch who can do a lot in this regard, but such a vision is not put forward by any one till now.

Legal Rights and Awareness

There have been tremendous strides in the creation of legal rights and assistance programmes for victims of crime. Today, every country has an extensive body of basic rights protections for victims within its statutory code. Women victims have enough laws to take care of themselves. KELSA (Kerala State Legal Services Authority) is another opportunity for the victims.

Police department is today a transformed institution as it has become more 'friendly' with people. The attitude of police to the people has changed considerably during the last decade. Police has adopted several innovative practices to find out the various crimes against women in their area and persuade them to register the cases. But a major portion of the tribal population of Wayanad is still in the grip of ignorance as far as their legal rights in all areas are concerned.

Victims and registration of cases

The study reveals that not many crimes are registered due to various reasons. The victims are reluctant to register cases due to the difficulties faced in this process. They said that the process of registering is a difficult task since the public look at them as if they have committed a crime. Another reason is that they have experienced indifferent attitude from the part of the police too in such situations. In many cases, the police and the public look down upon the victim as if they are the faulted.

In some cases, where the victim took the initiative to register the case, the police tried to make 'amicable settlements' with both parties by settling the case after receiving some monetary compensation from the man who caused her pregnancy. This attitude disheartens the tribal women, affects their self respect, and leaves them unattended.

Awareness about their rights

This study brings out that most of the victims didn't know about their rights and privileges. Victims face many difficulties including going to the police station, filing the case, etc. The tribal women, who are already marginalized in the society, are ignorant about the ways and means of the formalities of Acts safeguarding their rights. Adding to this is their illiteracy and backward educational situation. This make them depend upon others to fill forms or write a petition, etc. Without proper legal aid, they find it acutely difficult to face such situations. These difficulties deprive them from availing the legal favours.

As per GO (Ms) No 25/05/SCSTDD dated 20-06-2005, Government have issued orders stating that the Competent Authorities shall issue Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe community certificates to the children born out of inter caste married couple only as per the caste/community of his/her father subject to the conditions of acceptance, customary traits and tenets, stipulated in the judgements of Supreme Court of India.

As per the Judgement dated 10-08-2005 of the Full Bench of the High court of Kerala in WP (C) Nos. 2483,7039,17317 of 2005 and connected cases (Indira Vs State of Kerala), the children born out of inter caste married couple of which one of the parents is Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe can claim the status of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe on proof of the conditions of the acceptance, customary traits and tenets under which such children are brought up. This judgment is beneficial for the children of unwed mothers. If at all the biological father of the child is from non-tribal community or from a forward caste the child can get the benefits of a member of the scheduled tribe community.

Conclusion

It is very much evident that the awareness and utilization of legal options are minimal as far as the Paniya unwed mothers are concerned. In this regard the investigator has observed another cultural factor also. Some of the Paniya unwed mothers told the investigator that they are still supported financially and otherwise by the man responsible for the pregnancy. They are satisfied with the way this arrangement is going on. They sympathize with the man that he is married and couldn't do anything in such a situation. Otherwise they never had any antagonism towards the man who made them pregnant. They told the investigator that they still love the man and he still loves them. In that case they are unwilling to take any legal move against him. This attitude was observed among several women in Paniya community.

Even after the presence of such a huge number of support systems in the society, the Paniya unwed mothers are suffering from all sorts of alienation. If these systems function for the well being of these women and programmes are formulated which are comprehensive and considering the cultural and social peculiarities of the concerned, the problem of these women can be met to a large extent. The lack of coordination between various departments and agencies of development is one of the major reasons for the failure of many of the development activities. But it still remains a truth that the unwed mothers are left unsupported in this antagonistic society.

Chapter Six

Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion

This last chapter logically concludes the research report that gave a description of the objectives of this study, review of available literature, research process, case presentation, data analysis and discussion leading to the findings of this study. Now researcher summarizes here what all matters dealt with in the earlier chapters and systematically concludes this report. As it is a qualitative study the scope of replication is limited. At the same time this report would be beneficial for those who wish to carry out further research in this field of study.

Summary

The present research focused on one of the burning problems faced by a relatively unknown section of the population in Kerala. The tribes who constitute only around one percent of the total population of the state itself is a relatively invisible group of people with little presence in the political, economic, cultural and social life of this place. In spite of the tribal welfare programmes for improving their standard of living, still most of them are remaining at the lower rungs of the development ladder and keeping a distance from the so called mainstream society controlled by the non-tribal people. But the condition of all tribal communities is not the same; there are advanced communities including the Mala Arayas of Kottayam district and the Kanikkar of Thiruvananthapuram district. However, on the other side there are primitive tribal groups like the Koragas of Kasargod district or the Kattunaicker of Wayanad district. Thus the socio-economic conditions of the 36 tribal communities in Kerala are highly heterogeneous.

The Paniyan tribe selected for this study is the most populous and one of the most backward communities in the state. They primarily inhabit the Wayanad district of Kerala. Being agricultural labourers they earn only little and lead a life of financial hardships. Their educational achievement is low and consequently their presence in the

government bureaucracy is also very meagre. Even though the landlessness and problems of poverty are serious among them they do not have the resources and leadership to organize agitations to improve their living conditions. Thus unemployment, poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, poor housing, land alienation etc are the hallmark of this tribe. Their living conditions pose serious questions to the well known Kerala model of development.

It is a universally known fact that always the living conditions of women and children remain backward in comparison with that of the men in a community. The tribes are no exception to this general trend. The women in the Paniyan tribal community are more backward than men. Among these backward women the unwed mothers are still the most backward and neglected group as described in the earlier chapters of this report. Presence of unwed mothers in a community itself indicates the neglect towards women. This is a serious problem violating the human rights of these hapless women. This problem is multidimensional; on one side it shows how the Paniyan women are sexually exploited and on the other hand it is a problem of the children of these unwed mothers whose socialization and upbringing is threatened in many ways.

Like many other problems in the tribal areas onset of this problem can also be associated with the entry of non tribes into their locality. The changes brought by the immigration of outsiders and the rules and regulations implemented by the government especially in the post Independence period transformed the tribal way of life and value system. The strict adherence to marriage practices and serious attention shown to premarital and extramarital sexual relations are some of the changes in the Paniyan way of life after imbibing the non tribal value system and adherence to the legal system of the country. Today their own customary marriage practices are defined as illegal as per the provisions of the law of the state like the Special Marriage Act. For example fixing a minimum age for the bride and groom was something not known to the Paniyans so that their children get married below the stipulated age are liable to be punished as per the provisions of The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012. But this is injustice

to them as the law makers of the country are not giving any respect to the customary practices of the tribes which is part of their culture.

The problems of unwed mothers need to be analyzed in this wider context. It is also a by product of acculturation that happened due to the immigration of non tribal settlers into the tribal region and also due to the inappropriate strategies of tribal development followed by the central and state governments. When the non tribes entered the tribal areas as plantation owners, cultivators, traders, manual labourers in the estates, government officials, etc they in many ways came into close contact with the tribes who were the native people. The unscrupulous men often exploited the naïve tribal girls to satisfy their sexual desires. Many of such men gave them false promises that they will marry them. As the present study shows some of the tribal girls were unaware of the connection between sexual intercourse and pregnancy. The general tendency of the men was to abandon the girls once they become pregnant. Then the poor girls find themselves helpless to manage this difficult situation. In the early periods of immigration pregnancy out of wedlock was not seriously dealt by the tribal community and the pregnant women used to get support from the family and they were not the targets of social stigma. But today the situation has changed especially after a sizable number of tribal people get educated at least at the elementary level and also due to the increasing awareness of tribes about the exploitation they are subjected to. The exposure to the mass media especially the visual media created awareness among them. Some of the tribal organizations also have given attention to the problems of unwed mothers.

In this changed circumstances the occurrence of unwed motherhood is taken seriously by the Paniyan community. The victims are not supported by their own family and community. They are treated as deviants and naturally they have to face the brunt of social stigma. Subjects of the present investigation also reported that only in few cases they got the support of their mothers. In most of the cases the man responsible for pregnancy abandoned the girl. In some instances the man gave some financial support which was not sufficient or regularly paid so that the girls could not depend on that. In

some cases the family supported the victims especially when they are the only daughter of their parents. In those families where they are not accepted they are given very bad treatment including food and living arrangements as described earlier.

The community also showed a stigmatized response towards the unwed mothers. Therefore, their social ties were either broken or estranged. As a result of this the victims also try to keep themselves away from public gaze as far as possible. But as they have serious financial needs they are forced to go for work. As most of them are educationally backward they go for manual labour. In such occasions also they find it difficult to mingle with others in the group.

The children of the unwed mothers are also experiencing problems of social stigma. Some of the subjects revealed that customary life cycle rituals for the pregnant woman and the foetus were denied to them. But they reported that after the birth of the child he/she got lifecycle rituals. The children of the unwed mothers are supported only by their mothers which restricts their life chances. Sometimes these children also face ridicule from their peers and other senior members of the group. As their mothers did not get good medical treatment and nutritious food during their pregnancy it sometimes affect their health and some of them had only low birth weight. Thus the problems faced by unwed mothers spill over to their next generation whose life chances are also lower than the children come from the so called normal families with their parents legally married.

Another group of people adversely affected by the problem of unwed motherhood is the family members of the victim especially parents and siblings. On one side the unexpected pregnancy of their family member is shocking news for them. Their immediate reaction is usually against the victim rebuking her for this fault. Sometimes, after a while the mother accepts her daughter but other family members continue with their hostile response towards her. That is why in this study it is found out that there is discrimination towards the victim in the living arrangements, food and in the social interactions inside the family. Most important problem faced by the family members is

that of their public image itself. When the issue of unwed motherhood is known to outsiders of the family they start ridiculing not only the victim but also the family members, especially the parents. This is the major concern of the family members as they find it difficult to rationalize what is happened in their family. Indirectly they also become the targets of social stigma. Some of them are self critical and blame themselves for the lapse in monitoring the activities of the victim.

In the community members have a mixed reaction. Some of them just ignore it as it is not directly affecting them or their family. Another group take it seriously and consider that such incidents tarnish the image of their community and precautions shall be taken to avoid the recurrence of such problems in future. They may blame the victim and her family members and show a hostile attitude towards them. Some others may sympathize with the family of the victim but advise them to take precautions to prevent such incidents in future. The study also showed that there are even some cunning and unscrupulous men who try to further exploit the victim as they feel that she is a person of loose morals so that she can be easily solicited. In general the response of the local community is not favourable to the victim and her family as the members consider her action as unacceptable as per the norms of their community.

Recommendations

The present study on the basis of its intensive data collection and analysis put forward some recommendations before the planners, policy makers and administrators working in the field of tribal development. As the condition of the unwed mothers of the tribal communities is really pathetic steps are to be taken to support them as they deserve a better treatment from the society in general and government in particular.

- Finding a livelihood is the most serious concern of unwed mothers. Therefore provide regular financial assistance to them in the form of pension. The pension provided now through *Snehasparsam* project is not reaching many of the deserving women. While some are not aware of this scheme others are

discouraged by the formalities involved in applying for this benefit. Increase the present amount of pension to a minimum of 2000 rupees per month and take steps to disburse it without any interruption. In addition simplify the procedure for putting up the application for this scheme.

- Provide training to unwed mothers on some crafts so that they can become entrepreneurs themselves and earn a decent income. Dairy farming, stitching, umbrella making, pickle making, etc are examples of some areas where these women can find some opportunities.
- Government should take steps to establish centres where the trained unwed mothers can be employed.
- Some of the victims are interested in driving. They could be provided loans from the Tribal Development Department to purchase auto rickshaw or car so that they can earn a living out of that by using these vehicles for taxi service.
- Through the government agencies like Social Security Mission, ICDS, *Kudumbasree* Mission etc give awareness to the young women in tribal communities regarding the dangers of exploitation by the antisocial elements and the precautions to be taken to protect themselves.
- Equip the police and other government officials working in the tribal areas to give necessary support to the girls who are the victims of sexual exploitation.
- Strictly enforce the laws to punish the culprits of sexual offences against tribal girls.
- Tribal Development Department should give training to the traditional leaders of tribal hamlets regarding the seriousness of the problem of unwed mothers and equip them to recognize and prevent the persons who enter their settlements with such ulterior motives.
- There shall be some special projects for supporting the educational and health needs of the children of unwed mothers at least up to an age of 18 years.

- The Kerala State *Kudumbasree* Mission should strengthen its activities for the income generation of tribal women with special focus on the problems of unwed mothers.
- Central Government shall take initiatives to formulate a legislation governing the marriage practices and inheritance rights of the tribes. At present in the absence of such legislation marriages taking place in the tribal communities according to their traditional customary practices have no legal validity and cases are charged against them based on legislations like POCSO and Child Marriage Restraint Act.
- Give special attention to give proper education to the tribal girls so that they will be able to get empowered and protect themselves.
- *Jagratha Samithy* formed by the Kerala Women's Commission and operated with the help of Panchayati Raj Institutions could be used as an institution for preventing the sexual exploitation of tribal girls. The women who are in vulnerable situations can approach it for protection. As it is a semi-judicial body with the presence of a police officer, advocate, social worker etc it can effectively intervene to protect them.
- Tribal promoters should be given thorough training and should be given capacity development classes and workshops to make them efficient in their work. They can play a role in supporting the unwed mothers. Besides they can also identify the girls in vulnerable conditions so that by informing the parents or *Jagratha Samithy* about the risk faced by such girls they can be protected from sexual exploitation.
- The NGOs can play a role in the rehabilitation and empowerment of unwed mothers. They can organize training programmes for imparting various skills to these unwed mothers so that they can find some employment opportunities or can start some self employment projects.
- Improving the livelihood resources of the Paniyan tribe is required in order to support them. Forest department can launch programmes for planting trees to strengthen Non Timber Forest Produces. This will enhance the health of the forest,

and ensure livelihood of the forest depended communities and will develop a healthy relationship between the forest department officials and the tribal people. Increasing the living standards of the Paniyan women can help them protect themselves from any exploitation.

- The livelihood development of the women in Paniya community is a real challenge ahead. Skill development trainings, self employment schemes, group employment schemes, etc need to be planned and implemented. Community mobilizations need to be done thoroughly.
- The unwed mothers often are destined to lead a life of their own, unconcerned by others. They themselves do not have much physical and mental health due to the merciless life they are forced to live. During pregnancy, the mothers, due to their extreme poverty and abandoned position, are not able to take nutritious food that will sustain them through the pregnancy period and after the delivery. They are forced to go to work at any cost and are unable to take rest if they have any ailment. These continuous and tiring efforts leave them with little health and the infants also are automatically affected. Unless and until a keen intervention is been made from the part of the authorities, the situation will remain the same as these women do not have support from either family, community, or the society as a whole.
- Action should be taken against those responsible for creating unwed mothers under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Prevention of Atrocities Act. If needed DNA tests should be conducted to decide the father of the child born to an unwed mother.
- The problem of tribal land alienation and the incidence of unwed motherhood are interdependent. Many previous studies showed that the women belonging to landless families fall easy prey to this problem. Landless families are economically backward and naturally the poverty stricken women of such families can be easily seduced by the men. Therefore, government shall provide land to the

landless tribal families in order to make them economically self sufficient. This is one solution to this problem.

- Now there is no specific welfare scheme for the children of unwed mothers other than the normal welfare projects covering all children in the tribal community for their nutrition, education, etc. However, the needs of the children of unwed mothers are different from that of others as they are coming from single parent families. In addition to the satisfaction of their financial needs they have specific psychological needs that are to be taken care of. Like their mothers they are also often targets of social stigma. Therefore, some programmes for giving them good mental health may be introduced in the form of counselling at schools or any other innovative projects.

Conclusion

The present research project was able to unearth some of the obscure dimensions of the problems experienced by the unwed mothers in the Paniya tribal community living in the Wayanad district of Kerala. The Paniya community was selected as it is one of the tribal groups most affected by this problem. It is also a very backward community still depending on wage labour and collection of forest produce for their livelihood. Paniya women, being educationally and economically backward has multiple impacts due to the problem of unwed motherhood.

To a certain extent the tribal communities in the olden days were not maintaining strict codes of conduct regarding matters on marriage, pre-marital and extra-marital sex. In those days they were not exposed to the non-tribal culture and its rules and regulations on marriage and family. The very concept of monogamy that reached India from the Western countries was totally an alien concept for the tribes living partially isolated from the mainstream society. They were controlled by their own customary practices enforced by the elders and leaders of the community. Therefore, there was no social stigma against those who give birth to a child before marriage. But the situation has changed after they

were exposed to the non-tribal culture so that now their customary practices on marriage and family are no longer approved by the marriage and inheritance laws of the country. As the governments of the country could not yet formulate legislation specifically for the tribes, they face multitude of problems. Sometimes, even the marriages taking place in the community as per their customs are treated as illegal according to the provisions of the marriage rules applicable for the non-tribal Hindu community. Moreover the unwed mothers are targets of social stigma as the younger generation approved the non-tribal value system.

Invariably the unwed mothers of Paniya community face serious problems of livelihood and their most essential need is financial support from the government. The existing pension schemes of the Kerala Social Security Mission and some other self employment projects of the Tribal Development Department are insufficient. The need of the hour is to initiate comprehensive welfare programmes for the unwed mothers targeting both the mother and the child. In addition those who are exploiting the tribal girls should be appropriately punished as per the provisions of the law. A comprehensive legislation for regulating the marriage and inheritance among tribes shall be formulated. While doing that the customary practices on marriage and inheritance currently existing among tribes shall be seriously considered.

It is not only the lack of resources that keep the Paniya single mothers in poverty, but the inability and lack of options to make use of the available resources and own skills. If the development interventions could focus on this aspect and try to enhance the capacities of these women and also find employment opportunities according to their skills, the intervention will be worthy and long lasting.

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PROJECT TITLE: On the Cross Roads: Unearthing the Socio Economic Challenges Faced by the Unwed Mothers of the Paniya Tribe of Wayanad District, Kerala.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Personal profile

1. Name of the subject
2. Age
3. Education level
4. Occupation
5. Father 1. Alive 2. Dead 3. Estranged*(living but not having any contact with family)
6. Mother 1. Alive 2. Dead 3. Estranged
7. No. of Brothers
8. No. of Sisters
9. Your Ordinal Position 1. Eldest 2. Middle one 3. Youngest 4. Only Child
10. Support from father/mother/siblings
11. Type of Family 1. Joint 2. Nuclear 3. Extended
12. Current Living Status 1. With grandparents 2. With own parents 3. Living alone 4. With Husband 5. Others (specify.....)
13. Who is the principal supporter in family affairs? 1. Husband 2. Parents 3. Siblings 4. Husband's family 5. Self
14. Marital status: 1. Unwed Mother 2. Married
15. Type of marriage. 1. Family Arranged 2. Self arranged
16. Age at which get involved in affair:
17. Age at first pregnancy:
18. Number of pregnancy:
19. Number of miscarriages
20. Number of deliveries
21. Place of delivery: home/hospital
22. Number of surviving children
23. Provision of vaccination for child
24. Gender of children. 1. Male (.....) 2. Female (....)

25. Nature of contact with the father of child at present

II. Economic conditions

1. Occupation
2. Daily wage obtained
3. Average number of days you work in a month
4. Other types of Earnings to meet your livelihood needs
5. Ownership of house
6. Ownership of land
7. Area of land owned
8. Income from land
9. Occupation of Father 1. Farmer 2. Daily wage 3.. Business 4. Driver 5.. Sick 6. Any other specify____ 7.N.A
10. Occupation of Mother 1. Housewife 2. Domestic worker 3. Sick 4. Any other specify____(Private Firm Employee) 5.N.A
11. Economic problems in your life – indebtedness, poor purchasing power, poverty, starvation
12. Monetary benefits (Employment, financial assistance, loan, house, land) offered by the Govt as part of rehabilitative measures/ packages.

III. Major health issues affected by you

1. Personal health situation of you due to unwed motherhood
2. Adverse impact of pregnancy and childbirth on your health
3. Satisfaction in the care obtained during pregnancy and after delivery
4. Availing good quality of food for you and children
5. Type of health problems – mother/child
6. Need of regular medicine for mother/child
7. Medical facility available in your region
8. Role of primary health centres in availing medical care and treatment
9. Practice of availing medical facilities – local/outside
10. Health problems affecting the ability to work
11. Health problems leading to indebtedness
12. Health problems leading to dependency on others

13. Various hurdles in accessing health facilities in your region and outside
14. Assistance received from Tribal promoters and ASHA workers during various situations in your life

IV. Circumstances which led to unwed motherhood

1. The circumstances that lead to your pregnancy: 1. Rape/Sexual Abuse 2. Love Affair
2. Person involved in Rape/Sexual Abuse
3. Person responsible for pregnancy in a Love Affair
4. Identity of the person: tribal/nontribal; senior/junior; Hindu/non-Hindu; local/outsider
5. Connection with traditional tribal marriage
6. Tendency of others to exploit after becoming an unwed mother
7. Concerns of future security in your life

V. World view of unwed mothers

1. Your perception on the past experiences in life – what happened should have been avoided/what happened is normal and no need of any guilt feeling or embarrassment
2. Your expectations/ambitions about future – lead a normal life/children should be brought up efficiently/government should support them
3. Traditional tribal marriage is good and no need of minimum age of marriage
4. Unwed mothers should be given preferential treatment as they are not supported by a man
5. Marriage need not be an essential condition for sexual life and childbirth
6. An unwed mother need not be a target of social stigma

VI. Cultural conflicts

1. Current life situation of you as an unwed mother
2. Status enjoyed in the family
3. Status enjoyed in the community/Neighbourhood
4. Status enjoyed outside community
5. Problems of social stigma faced by you as an unwed mother
6. Cultural barriers you are facing from your community – public ridiculing; keeping away from family/religious functions; neglect; presenting as a morally weak person
7. Inner feeling that what happened is against traditional cultural mores
8. Spiritual and religious belief in your life and expecting god's support

9. Emotional exploitation in your life???
10. Sort of help you are receiving from others in unwed motherhood

VII. Effectiveness of government rehabilitative measures

1. Type of rehabilitative measures received from Government
2. Adequacy of monetary benefits offered by Govt as part of rehabilitative measures/packages for looking after children and for satisfying essential needs
3. Adequacy of Non-monetary benefits (educational facilities to children, counseling, medical and legal help) offered by the Govt as part of rehabilitative measures/packages for leading a healthy, decent and comfortable life.
4. Overall quality of services offered by the Govt as part of rehabilitative measures/packages.
5. Awareness about *snehasparsam* project in empowering the social and economic life of tribal unwed mothers
6. The extent of other external interventions for the empowerment of paniya unwed mothers – NGOs, religious/political organizations

VIII. Empowerment through External Interventions

1. Awareness of external agencies supporting tribal unwed mothers
2. Nature of their support/activities: monetary support/self-employment/counseling/child care/housing/loans/drinking water
3. Type of agencies: government/NGOs/religious/cultural/political
4. Impact of their activities in contributing to the empowerment of tribal unwed mothers