

In those days there were around 50 families living here, in tiled roof houses. Public conveniences like today are completely absent. We had no facilities even for drinking water. We had to walk for kilometers to fetch water. Those days we used earthen pots and on the way back, if the pot tricks and breaks, then there is no water. Only after we fetch water, we were given food. And it was not rice, like it is today. It was *ragi*, *chama*, *veragu*, *kambu*, *chola* etc. Steam cakes made with the millets were made and we ate only that. On special occasion on festivals, there was rice. And it is not like today where each family cooks and eats their own rice. When in one house someone cooks rice, they will take it to the next house and share. Like that we shared and ate while living in tiled roof houses. The people in the village had a deep sense of unity while living under tiled roofs. Today we had terraced houses. AHADS (Attappadi Hills Area Development Society) people came and started building houses intended for us. The chieftan of our house refused to live in AHADS houses. So the project went to Varagampadi village and our chieftan continue to live in the tiled roof house. Then slowly one by one people started getting terraced house. Maybe because of that we lost a sense of unity. Whether I am getting a terraced house or not, is what everyone is thinking. In those days we farmed together, shared and ate together. And it was not rice. It was so difficult to get rice. Even if someone brings rice, at 8 p.m. in the evening, people would crowd and buy. Nowadays there is plenty of rice. The government is giving sacks full of rice, but children don't want to eat rice. Even if we force-feed them, they refused to eat. Even dogs are not eating rice. The steam cakes alone are not tasty. To cook them, you need certain ingredients which has become so rare. Look around, there are plenty of banana palms growing but can we eat them? We can eat bananas but not the plant. No, right? We need *karuwellamai*, *ragi*, *kambu*, *chola*, all these ingredients put together and make a sauce with tamarind. The essence of the food is different. It's nutritious. Rice meal doesn't have the nutrition. Whatever you eat today leads into pain. They say there is blood pressure, there is diabetes, in those days we collected herbs, put a pinch of salt and a few chillis cooked without oil. The taste is different. Now we pour so much oil, and cook a meal with rice. And can we eat it? Even if we eat, will it digest? If we had those times now, our kids and children would be so much healthier. They will get nutrition, which is not there in rice and lentils.

In the gruel that we used to make, we get all the nutrition. But for that, we need to cultivate, grow and harvest our own crops. Today who has the time for all that? We work all day for wages, and with that money we go to shop, buy groceries and cook. And people who have no work or wages, how do you think they are surviving? They are families who don't work or earn. What to do? Such people don't get nutrition.

If we farm in our own land and make our own food, like the earlier generation, the harvested items can be collected in sacks and be stocked, and consumed all year round. But now it has become only about the house. People farm bananas and two or three crops from the olden times. Crops of those days are different. They have disappeared. Maybe it was difficult to grow them, and forgotten. These days, a few who have some land and who are willing to toil make a sack or two full of millets. And stock for the year. And those who have no land, do nothing.

Half the people sold their land to Tamil settlers. For what? They gave it for food. In those days, each family had seven to eight children. If you make children, you need to feed them, dress them. Even I didn't get cloth. I just had one piece of cloth with which I went to school. Once I came back, I washed it, let it dry and wear it the next day, the same piece of cloth. It was very difficult to get cloth. I used to have a yellow bag for school. Either there was a gunny sack or a yellow cloth bag. I took the yellow cloth bag to go to school in Mattathukkad. Today's kids have school bags, shoes! We didn't have even flipflops, and we walked to the school. There was no school bus service. Even after the bus service came, we used to walk. Because you need money to get into the bus. I studied until seventh standard, walking. And I stopped going to school. There was no work, and no money. What to do? My parents stopped me from going to school. I used to work to break stones for the new roads. Now things have become

more convenient. There are roads and vehicles. And life is much easier to live but pointless. Living has lost its charm. Today we lead a meaningless and pointless life. Everything is there except the sense of unity. I don't like it when I look at you. You don't like it when you look at me. Thought the government is giving us something at least, if only we could share all that with everyone. If only we could find happiness in that. But you see, I don't like you and you don't like me. Those days, even if someone makes one *dosa* in the village, it was shared. Kids from this home slept in some other home, and somebody else is living in our home. Such was life when it was the tiled roof. And that sense of life is not the same with terrace roof.

In a way, things are better, from days when we had nothing to wear. Now we have almost everything that we need. We get 100 days guaranteed to work. AHADS came, roads came, and gradually we have also transformed like the settlers. Otherwise our people would not even have cloth to wear. I myself lived in such times, 7 to 8 kids in the house, poverty, hard work in the forest, to make what we eat. For cloth we needed money. Only when we sell what we have, we get money. Parents would tear a piece of cloth and share it among the kids, wrap it around and hide the shame. In such circumstances, our father's generation sold what they had, their land to manage hunger and poverty. Our grandparent's generation gave away their lands. For them, there was land everywhere, in abundance, lot of land that was unutilized. What to do with the land that was not used? In those days, they didn't know the value of land. They had entire mountains where they lived, and subsisted with children and family. Such lands were given away to settlers, sometimes for a sack of rice, or a bag of corns. That's how Adivasi lost their land. They gave it out of hunger. Now if you go ask them, do you think they will give it back? They have planted coconuts, mango trees, jackfruits, and bananas in that land. And how if you ask him to leave, and return the land, will he? There are still people who have some land left. Those who gave have nothing left. They have to depend on the 100 day work and eat rice meal. They don't get millet steam cakes. There used to be two shops, one run by Ranganathan, and one Gundan. They still run their shops. Weekly market happens in Kottathara. I am about 40 years old. Those days there was no TV, grinder or a mixer. We had stones- grinding stones, pounding stones. These were not brought from shops. We made them by ourselves, to pound and grind. There was no oil. Now we get ready made spices, and they are not tasty. The *sambar* made with packaged spices don't taste good at all. Once we had to walk to get water, today each house has a tap. There are roads and concrete paths.

There was no TV, there was a radio. We listened to the songs from the radio. And the song was over, we started dancing in the moonlight. People sat around and discussed ethics, ways of life and resolved disputes. Sit and talk about experience, what they did, what they ate, how they worked...Now such gatherings are gone. Everyone has TV in their house. No one knows what is happening in their house. Even there was fight going on, there is no one to attend to.

Those days, every night we also sat together and talked, found out the problems, and figured out solutions together. Today no one knows what is going on outside the house. We watch TV. When you are so immersed in the drama, how can you know about the quarrel going on outside?

Those days, people go to work with their cattle to the forest at the day break. They collect and grow whatever that is needed and when they come back in the evening, another group of people go to the forest to guard and protect the crops from wild animals. And whoever left in the village gather, eat, sing, dance, talk, tell stories all night around the fire. Sleep next to the fire. Today there is no one to set fire in the village. Those elders are all gone, one by one. Today people watch TV, go for some job in the morning, come back in the evening, and watch TV. This is the current situation. What is to come next, I don't know.

Told by Kamala.