

In the evening of February 22, 2018, A 30 year old man named Madhu, a tribal from Attappadi, Kerala was severely beaten up by the mob who accused him of stealing food items which included rice. Although later the mob called the local police. Madhu fell unconscious while he was taken to the police station. He was declared brought dead by the doctors.

Justice K. Surendra Mohan who is in charge of Kerala State Legal Services Authority (KELSA) sent a letter to the Chief Justice to seek court's intervention in Mohan's matter. The letter said that there are number of welfare measures being implemented in tribal areas through different government agencies. Also the charitable organizations are involved in conducting poverty alleviation programmes.

The letter further stated that Madhu was forced to steal food despite such initiatives being in place, it shows that the government measures are not effective.

Necessary changes should be made in the welfare schemes for the tribals till the benefits reach them.

Calling the incident an eye- opener, the letter said there needs to be an immediate revamp of the implementation procedures for tribal welfare schemes.

Who are Scheduled Tribes?

The Government of India Act 1933 incorporated some provisions and the policy of reservation for the tribes notified in the Schedule. The concept of Scheduled Tribe emerged henceforth and was included in the Constitution of independent India. A list of tribes was incorporated in the Eighth Schedule of the constitution. In 1971, the list contained names of 527 tribes. The reservation policy or the policy of protecting discrimination for the notified or Scheduled Tribes has been made a constitutional obligation.

What are Constitutional Safeguards for Tribals:

- **Article 15(4)** - special provisions are made for educational advancement of the Scheduled Tribes. These provisions are like reservation of seats and relaxation in marks in admission to educational institutions, scholarships, etc.
- **Article 46** - the State is enjoined upon to promote with special care to education and economic interests of SC and ST and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
- **Articles 330 and 332** - seats are reserved for SC and ST in Lok Sabha State Vidhan Sabhas.

- **Article 339(1)** - the President may at anytime appoint a Commission to report on the administration of the Scheduled Area and the welfare of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the State.

What is the role of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs:

It is the nodal Ministry for the overall policy, planning and coordination of programmes for the development of the Scheduled Tribes (STs). The programmes and schemes of the Ministry are intended to support and supplement, through financial assistance, the efforts of other Central Ministries, the State Governments and voluntary organizations, and to fill critical gaps taking into account the needs of ST.

Recent tribal welfare schemes:

Van Bandhu Kalyan Yojana (VKY):

Introduced by the Central government in 2014 as a Central Sector Scheme with an allocation of Rs. 100 crore.

The Central Government proposes to replicate the intervention with special focus on

- o the qualitative and sustainable employment for tribal families;
- o bridging infrastructure gaps with focus on quality;
- o Improving the quality of education and health and improving the quality of life in tribal areas.

Ministry of Tribal Affairs under its Special Area Programmes provides funds as an additive to the State Plan for carrying out skill development and employment-cum-income generation activities. During the financial years 2014-15 and 2015-16, the Ministry has impressed upon the State Governments for promotion of need based integrated livelihood initiatives and skill upgradation of tribals to get them respectable jobs.

The Government of India had launched a Central Sector Scheme “Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana (VKY)”. The VKY is broadly a process, which aims at achieving overall development of tribal people through convergence of available resources, with an outcome-based approach, monitored by an independent agency.

As per the poverty ratios estimated by the erstwhile Planning Commission, the population of Scheduled Tribes (ST) below poverty line has come down from 47.4% in 2009-10 to 45.3% in 2011-12 in rural areas. In urban areas also, it has declined from 30.4% in 2009-10 to 24.1% in 2011-12.

Current Scenerio

On Friday, March 02, 2018, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan visited Madhu's house and assured that stern action will be taken against the culprits of Madhu. He also announced that setting up of care homes for persons with mental health issues. In the tribal region a government hospitals will be strengthened to provide health care facilities will be made available by April 2018. The CM also announced that ragi and millet will be cultivated in the tribal areas and the community kitchen scheme will be extended. Deaddiction centers will be set up and strong awareness campaigns will be carried out to address the issue. Individual care will be given for the alcoholics. There will be individual centric and general measures to address the issue. Disability census will be conducted to find out and support differently-abled people. Stern action will be taken for offences committed under Prevention of Atrocities against SC and ST.

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