

Those days during my father's time there were good rains. There were lots of cows and goats. We made plenty of *ragi*, *chola*, *kambu*, *viraku*, *pandi-muri-pandi*, *are-pandi*... The cows and goats gave plenty of milk. We didn't sell it to the dairy society like we do now. We prepared the land, sowed, grew them, harvested and ate well. Sometimes people from outside also started coming. They asked "Mooppan, how are you doing?" "I am well." "Do you keep cows or goats?" "Yes, five to six cows and goats we have."

Those days those who plough the land, would plough the land. Those who cut the bush, clear the bush. That's how. In the night, after all the work, all of us and others gather and make fire. Sitting around the fire, the elders would share their wisdom. They used to say "We lived in different times. And now, you live very different life. In your times, how things will work, how life moves, how to live, how to get married..." all these things they used to say. And as they professed, as days pass, and times change. People increase in numbers. Times are indeed changing. Those days, they ate well healthily, walked the land and passed their life. They never went to hospitals. They sourced medicines from the forest and mountains. If they got a stomachache, they ate some roots and got well. Never went to the hospital, not even for childbirth. If a woman is pregnant and in pain, as the new life arrived, all women came together to attend. Why? Baby has to be born and it should not be left unattended. Like that, they delivered children well, brought them up well.

Nowadays things have become challenging. I will tell you how. If you go to the hospital, then they send us to faraway places from there. "Go to Thrissur city," they say. Who knows that? Only the educated have that knowledge. Those days this kind of education was not there. What people spoke had the truth in it. The uttered word had power.

Nowadays it is not the spoken word that matters. Instead, writing has all the power. That's the era now. During our times, we go to grace the gods, cows, we collect firewood, by 10 in the morning we eat and by 8 or 9 we had dinner. There was good yield, we lived well, survived well.

When it came to marriage, first the man has to like the woman. The woman has to like the man. Then comes the talk of the marriage. "Father, I like this girl," the son has to go tell her parents, and request them to talk and organize the wedding with the girl's family. Nowadays, things are not like that. It's just a "hello" over the phone. And life begins. Some of them get along well, some don't. That's the story of couples today.

Anything and everything we have to go to the hospital today. Then they do this and that to you. Some people even die. Such horrible times have come now. I don't know how the coming generation is going to fare. Our generation live in different times. The next generation has a different situation. We ate different leaves and herbs, and drunk a lot of milk and buttermilk while growing up. Today people wake up in the morning and go to a tea stall or somewhere. In our times, we wake up and right away started working in the fields, ploughing or cutting from around six to ten, grazing cattle, singing and dancing. Now it is the minimum work guaranteed program of the government that has replaced all that. If not for that there is nothing left.

We came to this farm, around 175 members. For 15 years, we were given work here in the second site. People from Paloor, Doddu Gatti, Uriyanchale, Vattalakki, Marappalam, Keerippai were brought here to this farm by the government. During those times, we paid a share of 1 rupee and 25 paise to become member of the farm society. They said "Mooppan, after 5 years, we will give you 5 acres of land per person, cattle, a house, utensils for house." With this promise people were brought and settled here. It's been 40 years. Till today, they have not kept their word, and we got nothing. We continue to live in this farm site. With children and families, we are 21 families living here. This is how we are living.

When a person dies, the government gives 500 rupees and for the funeral, another 500. That's what the farm gives us now. A member is only a thousand rupees worth. A lot of ministers come and go. A lot of bureaucrat come and go, collectors, RDO's... We continue here like this. From the day we came here, till today, nothing has changed in that sense. Like this 7 families in the third site. Each year we used to get one blanket each. Since 10 or 15 years, even that has stopped. It's difficult. No jobs, only the minimum work guarantee scheme. Even the educated youth don't get jobs. Many Adivasis are educated today but they don't get jobs. Those officers who come here make opportunities for their children, that's the situation. I don't know which government come and do what for us.

When we return to the forest, and try some farming, the same night the elephant comes and destroys it all. We are scared to live even inside our homes. This is the present.

About the next generation, how they grow, which way they go, I don't know. My life is getting over. What to do?

Told by Nanjan Mooppan.