

“SOCIO ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF TSUNAMI VICTIMS IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT ”

Dr. ANILKUMAR.P,
Assistant Professor
P.G. Department of History
Iqbal College, Peringammala.

Executive Summary

The tsunami of 26, December, 2004 affected the villages located on the seashore of Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. There was incredible loss of life, infrastructure, houses, changes in the livelihood pattern and socio-economic conditions of the fisherfolk. The governments, both Central and State along with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) reacted positively to the situation. The tsunami has delivered a crushing blow to women. The women who were relocated by tsunami faced a number of problems in the relief camps and temporary shelters. Even in the newly constructed houses, the women faced gender-specific problems. This project describes the conditions of victims in Kanyakumari District and the specific problems faced by women and children due to exciting based on survey data.

In the period of Sangam Age, the most destructive waves are generated from large area on the ocean floor that is called in many names as “KadalKol”, “Deluge” and “Pralaya”. After the Sangam period the above names became obsolete and the new name is now popularly known as Tsunami. It would ensure the long-term security of the sole means of survival for more than five million fishermen and women living. A larger part of land beyond the present Kanyakumari is said to have submerged under sea thousand years ago. This sorrowful incident is lamented in *Cilappathikaram*.

The states of Tamilnadu witnessed massive destruction following the huge surging tsunami waves hitting the coastal land on 26th of December 2004. Tsunamis are high tidal waves caused due to the sea water entering into the coastal land areas. The tsunami took away the lives of thousands, destroyed houses and disrupted the entire fabric of the fisher folk and others living in the coastal areas. In Kanyakumari District 33 coastal villages were badly affected. One Lakh people were affected and 17,200 houses are damaged. Around 819 persons were killed and 329 injured. More than 5000 fishing boats were damaged. The Government setup 62 relief camps to accommodate 39810 persons.

Kanyakumari district is known as the “land’s tip of India”. It is “a fairy land” and lies at the southern tip of the Indian sub-continent. It was formerly known by English as Cape Comorin. It belonged to the erstwhile

princely state of Travancore-Cochin. The Kanyakumari district has an area of 1672 sq. km. It occupies 1.29% of the total area of Tamil Nadu. It lies between $77^{\circ}05$ and $77^{\circ}36$ of the eastern longitudes and $8^{\circ}03$ and $8^{\circ}35$ the northern latitudes. It is bounded by Tirunelveli district on the north and east and the south-eastern boundary is the Gulf of Mannar. To the south is the Indian Ocean that superbly mingled with the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. To the west and the northwest it is bounded by Kerala. It has a coastal line of 68 kilometres which accounts for 7.2 % of the state's coastal length.

Kanyakumari District has the highest rate of literacy in Tamilnadu. Tamil and Malayalam are the main languages of this district. Hindus and Christians form a sizeable percentage of the population of the district and there are a number of Muslim dominated belts in the district. The caste system in the society is weakened to a great extent especially after independence the growth of education and improvements in transport and communication. Before state organization on linguistic basis was taken place in 1956, Kanyakumari was the name of a small township surrounding the Kanyakumari Devi temple. On 26th December 2004 Tsunami wave caused due to the sea water entering into the coastal land areas. The Tsunami took away the lives of thousands and destroyed the entire fabric of the fisher folk and others living in the coastal areas. Tsunami is generated when the sea-floor abruptly deforms and vertically displaces the overlying water.

Almost all coastal villages in Kanyakumari were witness to nature's gory dance of death as the tidal waves swallowed men, women, children and animals. Some of the non fishing folk, who had gone to the beach to watch the sea, were washed away, eye witnesses said. A two and a half year old girl was drowned when her grandfather carried her to the shore at Sothavilai to show her waves. The Tsunami that affected thousands of lives including that of children was unexpected and sudden leaving children confused, shocked and frightened. In a moment, their whole world was disrupted. Some children were orphaned, some lost one parent, some lost their siblings, and for some they had to adjust to a displaced life as they lost their homes.

Tsunami returned to devastate India after an interval of more than sixty years. The Tsunami of 1941 and before that in 1881 was set off by earth quakes in the Andhaman and Nicobar Islands. A total of 2,260 kms of the coastline besides Nicobar Island was affected. The coastal landscape of Kanyakumari District consists of long and sandy beaches, rocky and sandy ridges, sandy and swampy estuaries. According to an estimate 2,17,440 fisher-folks are distributed in the 44 villages of Kanyakumari coast and coastline about 26 percent of the fishermen of Tamilnadu. The population density of coastal villages is very high and the houses are very much

congested. Almost all the villages face severe land problems, insanitation and water scarcity. The marine fisheries sector has an important place in the District's economy. The fishermen and other people who lived in the coastal areas, were badly affected by the Tsunami. The fishermen lost their family members, fishing nets, boats, other means of livelihood and houses thereby their lives shattered and destroyed. They have their living near the sea shore for generations worshipping the Sea Goddess who is supposed to nurture and protect them and enable them to fish and feed their family. The same sea all of a sudden becomes angry, furious and causes massive destruction to their lives.

Official estimates issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, says that the death toll due to the tsunami is 9995, with Tamilnadu accounting for 7923 of the death alone. Number of missing people was put at 6011, after thirteen days of the tsunami. The total loss accounting for the loss of houses, means of livelihood and other infrastructures estimated were Rs 47 billion in Tamilnadu, which is alone 50% of the total loss in South India. The centre and state Governments, besides individuals and organizations, have committed themselves to providing relief to the victims. In Kanyakumari District an extent of 12 hectares Horticultural lands are affected. The state Government must ensure that the help reaches the victims and that they are not duped by middleman posing as sympathizers. If necessary, the help of NGOs and self help groups can be taken to educate the people.

In Kanyakumari District, 33 coastal villages were affected by Tsunami, which resulted in the loss of 873 lives, apart from many hundreds getting injured and properties worth crores destroyed. The Kanyakumari District administration has started identifying land for the construction of permanent houses for Tsunami affected fisher folk. All new settlements should comply with the coastal Regulation zone stipulations, which prohibited construction within 500 meters, from the sea. Even fisherman who had not been affected by the killer waves would be persuaded to shift to a safe distance. Permanent rehabilitation would be taken up later. This will include, "reconstruction of houses, provision of boats and nets and anything they will require to start a new life. This will be an enormous Package running into several hundred crores".

The fishermen have to work very hard. Their occupation is to fight against the tides, over the ocean currents of the under water. The destruction was severe. Huts and pucca houses have been flattened, fishing boats have been smashed, buses and big tankers have been strewn around. The families living along the coastline have lost all their possessions. Counseling is one of the main rehabilitation measures for the traumatized victims. It takes patience, gentleness, compassion and the ability to listen

with love and understanding. The definite of the fisher people have been wounded by the insensitivity of donors who have thrown aid at them in an appallingly crude manner. Residents of the coastal areas started running to land the moment then saw the waves approaching their hutments. Many of them lost the race. All the houses at Azikkal near Kovalam in Kanyakumari District were damaged.

The three kilometer long road, connecting Colachel with Vaniyakudi, was flooded. Road traffic in the district remained paralyzed. Hundreds of people, carrying their children and belongings walked to safety from Mandaicadu, Manavalakurichi and Colachel. After Tsunami almost all coastal villages was affected. All houses at Azhikkal near Kovalam collapsed, bit by giant waves. The affected were put to hardship as the Tamil Nadu state Transport Corporation stopped services on the Colachel and Kadiyapattinam routes. Hundreds of people, along with their children and carrying household articles, trekked from Mandaicadu, Manavalakurichi and Colachel to Monday market.

According to the Home ministry's Disaster management Division, the toll has risen to 9,682 with Tamil Nadu accounting for 7,923 deaths. The ministry quoted reports from the financial loss in Tamil Nadu was put at Rs. 2730.70 crores. This Calamity struck every fisherman's family one way or the other. Either the head of the family or his children was washed away by the killer wave or their property was damaged. The sources said about 6.82 lakh people were affected by the sea's fury; out of them 85 percent fishermen

Scope of the study

The scope of the study are really great. It is calculated to find out the social and economic conditions of Tsunami victims. It intends to protect severely affected coastal areas are the Kanyakumari District. Tsunami was called a mini '*Kadalkol*' mini '*Pralaya*' and a mini '*Deluge*' which are mentioned in our ancient literature. In India, the Indus/Kutch region was affected by these waves during the period before Christ. During the period after Christ, the seismic waves struck many countries in the world. Finally on 26th December, 2004, Tsunami, occurred from the epicenter of Sumatra due to earthquake and hit many countries and islands of the world.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the socio economic background of the Tsunami victims.
- The conditions of Tsunami victims in the past and the present.
- To suggest suitable measures to improve the conditions and solve the problems of the Tsunami victims.

- The assess for the individuals in the dimensions of their life, and the current level of disability. The children were also screened for their psychological morbidity.

Major Findings of the Study

- Several studies reveal that more women died than men in the tsunami. The study evaluates on the socio-economic background, working and living conditions of Tsunami victims in Kanyakumari District.
- The study analyses the personal and family background of women and their economic and living conditions, income and expenditure pattern, standard of living, social status, working conditions, welfare facilities and security.
- The study reveals that the socio economic conditions of Tsunami victims in Kanyakumari District, in the beginning, were comparatively good. But later the facilities provided to them are not sufficient.
- The plight of the women survivors was no better after tsunami also. Their life in the relief camps and temporary shelters had been a source of concern since enough attention was not given to their specific needs.
- The study also analyses that the public services, including roads, transportation, electricity, water supply, education, health etc were not provided satisfied.
- The study deals with the problem of education of the children and focuses on the problem among the women and alcoholism for men.
- Lack of appropriate dresses was the main problem faced in the relief camps, while inadequate living area was the main problem experienced in the temporary shelters.
- The respondents has remembered with gratitude the humanitarian deeds of NGOs, Philanthropists, local people, Government and other institutions during the crisis when they were helpless and hopeless.
- The respondents who had lived in congested huts and small size tiled houses (44 per cent) were happy and satisfied about the new houses whereas 56 per cent of them were not satisfied since they had lived in big houses. Small size of the kitchen was found to be the main problem of the respondents in the new houses.
- There is a need of public education of stress related problems and that help is available. There should be education on stress management and on coping methods. Problems of drug addiction are to be discussed in the community and multi-modal approach should be taken to tackle this.

Recommendations

The study highlights some suggestions for the improvement of the situation and for the promotion of socio- economic victims of Tsunami in Kanyakumari District. The major suggestions in this regard are the following..

- There should be appointed one male and one female counselor at every village. They should be trained and maintained for increasing awareness, preparedness and effective management of the disaster situations.
- In the villages no such hospital facilities are there. So it is suggested to arrange weekly or bi – weekly medical camps with specialist doctors in the seashore areas.
- Education on how to identify persons who would need referral to the mental health professionals early should be included in training.
- Classes for different methods employed during counseling to be carried out periodically and counseling classes for handling only individuals.
- Measures to handle the counselors' helplessness, inability to handle the difficult cases, suicide attempts and threats, antisocial and immoral activities.
- Sex education to the vulnerable groups should be arranged, it will be change in attitude for the practice of healthy life style has to be stressed.
- Adoption of elderly into some families as grand parents may help them.