

## **More tribal people take the plough in Attappady**

*G. Prabhakaran*

MGNREGS helps turn bare farmlands green in the tribal heartland

More and more tribal people here are taking the plough again. Creating a fertile field for a revival of agriculture in this tribal heartland of the State is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

Many years ago, a majority of the 30,000-strong tribal population here left agriculture as a means of livelihood. Many had lost their lands, and those who still owned land had inadequate means to cultivate it. Absence of irrigation and marketing facilities worsened matters. The result was starvation and malnutrition in the hills. Now with the job scheme allowing employment of tribal labourers in farmlands, green shoots of agricultural recovery are springing up.

Of the 13,000 acres (1 acre = 0.4 hectare) of uncultivated land, 5,500 acres belongs to the tribal families, P.V. Radhakrishnan, Block Programme Officer, Attappady Tribal Block, says.

In the financial year 2010-11, 273 tribal families in 106 hamlets (Oorus) in the grama panchayats of Pudur, Sholayur, and Agali took up cultivation on 352 acres of their land. If given quality seeds, fertilizer, and irrigation and marketing facilities, the tribal people will be able to cultivate their land as a vocation, Mr. Radhakrishnan says.

Many of them still hold a good extent of land and earlier, their main vocation was agriculture. Bringing them back to agriculture will help ensure food security for them. Thus, the MGNREGS is acting both as a food security and a poverty alleviation scheme in Attappady, ensuring employment and helping convert bare land into farms.

Mr. Radhakrishnan says a good example for this change is Koodamchala in the Sholayur grama panchayat limits. During 2010-11, seven tribal families here cultivated five acres of their land that had been lying bare for many years. They cultivated plantain as the main crop and vegetables and cereals as inter-crops. Now, 1,500 plantains are ready for harvest.

Similar schemes have been taken up in the Bodychala hamlet in the Sholayur panchayat limits, Osathiyoor in Agali, and other hamlets. Some of the tribal people had left fishing as a vocation to take up agriculture.

The agriculture operations here are under the supervision of the Ooru Vikasana Samithi (hamlet development council). The technical support is given by the Attappady Hill Area Development Society and the Joint Forest Management Committee, Mr. Radhakrishnan says.

He says the tribal block has submitted a Rs.64-crore scheme under the MGNREGS for the development of agriculture on tribal land. If this scheme is implemented, more tribal people will return to agriculture.

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## Tackling rural India's problems is the mission of 28 youngsters

*M. J. Prabu*



*BIG DREAMS: Ankit Walia, a fellow, trying his hand on a gonoweeder. Photo: Special Arrangement*

Many farmers want more youth to take part in the programme

'Nothing changes' is the cynical reaction to the multitude problems plaguing the country's massive rural sector, from farmer suicides to depleting resources.

“These issues are debated profusely, triggering circular blame games, with a general conclusion that the responsibility lies in the hands of the country's youth to put things right. Yet, every year we see the educated youth overlooking this sector which is crying out loud for their attention,” says Dr. G.N. Hariharan, Principle co-ordinator, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Chennai

### **Face the challenge**

This year however, 28 persons with a maverick mindset have decided to stand up to the challenge.

These young professionals form the State Bank of India (SBI) Youth for India fellowship – a unique platform to enable educated Indian youth to understand the dynamics of the crises and adapt innovative solutions.

The program ties up with well-established NGOs like MSSRF, BAIF and Seva Mandir, allowing the fellows to work on various rural projects for a year, in eight states and union territories (namely, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala, Orissa, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry).

“Out of about 4,000 applications received, 200 candidates were shortlisted for interviews with 28 fellows including five women, being selected to work with the partner NGOs'. They are all graduates or postgraduates including alumni of eminent institutes such as IITs' and IIMs'. Most of the professionals have an engineering background (15 BE/B.Techs) or management (four fellows),” says Dr. Hariharan.

However, there are unique profiles with background in biotechnology, urban planning, law, mathematics, and agricultural science.

Professionally, almost one out of every four fellows is from the software sector, though there are many from diverse sectors like education, infrastructure, non-profit, healthcare and others.

### **Seeking solutions**

The fellows might be professionally and educationally diverse, but the one quality that unites them all, is that they are bored by their restricted cubical lives, and are seeking solutions to the burning issues detrimental to the country's future.

“Their intention is to do something about concerns most only prefer to “talk” about,” says Dr. Hariharan.

The fellows are working on various projects such as agricultural supply chain, education, health awareness, legal rights, rural tourism, tribal development, climate change awareness, etc. and

MSSRF being one of the pioneering NGOs in India, provides a platform for the fellows to start off interesting projects for them to work on.

### **Updated information**

For example Mr. Ankit Walia, a CRM Consultant is piloting an Interactive voice response system in Tamil, to enable farmers to get updated information about markets, farming practices, Government schemes etc.

In Vidarbha, a farmers-suicide ridden region, Mr. Shuvajit Payne, an ex-IIM consultant at IBM previously, is implementing a spoken English course to encourage alternative employment.

Ms. V. Suhasini, a computer science engineer, is working with women SHGs' in Puducherry to identify and promote sustainable rural livelihoods/enterprises, in the process strengthening the existing biovillage concept.

Ms. Anu Jacob, previously managing the HR activities of a startup, is working on making the 'Every village a knowledge centre' model self-sustainable by trying to increase the earning capacity of the knowledge workers.

### **Scaling up**

The potential of this batch has encouraged the organization to scale up the program next year and help out more NGOs.

Says Mr. Shuvajit Payne:

“Basically though we might have been financially secure working in big companies, at one point of time, we started developing a feeling that apart from earning money there must be something that as individuals we must achieve and give back to the society especially to the rural poor.”

“This opportunity proved the best platform for us to get a first hand feel of what rural India is really undergoing. At the end of our training, we hope to play a very constructive role in trying to solve the rural problems.”

### **Need more**

“But why only 28 fellows?” asks Mr. Shamrao Deshmukh, a farmer from Vidarbha, who desires more number of youth to take part in the programme with continued support from SBI..

For interacting with these fellows readers can contact Dr. G.N. Hariharan, Principle co-ordinator, M.S. Swaminthan Research Foundation, Taramani, Chennai, email: gnhariharan@mssrf.res.in, mobile: 9444904765 or Ms Geeta Verghese, SBIYFI co-ordinator. email chacko5@yahoo.com, Mobile 09620272251.

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# Vegetables turn dearer as arrivals decline

Staff Reporter

It is an echo of lorry strike call



*Striking sales: Some vegetable shops reported more sales on Thursday. A store in Anna Nagar.*  
— Photo: K. Pichumani

: With fewer arrivals from other States following the strike call by lorry owners associations, vegetable prices in the city have started soaring.

The cost of staple vegetables such as onions and potatoes shot up by Rs.4 a kg on Thursday. While onions were priced at Rs.22 a kg in retail markets as against Rs.18 kg on Wednesday, potatoes came for Rs.20 a kg. Retailers also reported that many households purchased more than the usual quantity apprehending further increase in the prices if the transporters' strike begins as announced from Thursday night.

Traders at the Koyambedu wholesale market said vegetables supplies from Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh have dwindled in the past few days as many of the lorry drivers wanted to return to their home town before the strike in southern States. It takes three days to transport the produce from northern States, they added.

S.Chandran, a wholesale trader, said the increase in the prices could be significantly higher if the strike prolongs for more than a day. Usually, the market receives vehicles from across the State and other parts of the country between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m. Some lorry owners have promised to transport loads an hour or two beyond Thursday midnight, he said.

Another trader V.R.Soundararajan said the wholesale prices of vegetables have gone up by at least Re.1 as some lorries from other States stopped coming a few days ago. The prices of a few



vegetables, including cabbage and beetroot, remain stable. The State government must sanction permission to bring produce to the market using other modes of transport if the lorry strike happens, he said.

Retailers in areas such as Kilpauk and Triplicane said they have little option than to charge the customers more as the wholesale prices have gone up by Rs.2 a kg. S.Thirupathi, a retail vendor in Mogappair, said “I sold tomatoes for Rs.13 a kg today. Many vegetables were priced at least Rs.4 more a kg than yesterday. If the Koyambedu market does not get its daily quota of vegetables for more than a day, retailers like me would have to charge double.”

Meanwhile, the Confederation of Surface Transport of Tamil Nadu president R.Sugumar said: “We are not participating in the strike and have hence decided to operate lorries in Chennai and the neighbouring districts of Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur. But, we have represented to the All India Motor Congress to call for a nationwide strike to seek a reduction in diesel price and toll charges.”

If the Southern India Motor Transport Association goes ahead with the strike plan, goods traffic from other parts of the State would be affected, he said.

The members of the confederation, Mr. Sugumar added, met Chief Minister Jayalalithaa on Thursday, who assured them that terminuses to park lorries would be opened in all districts and the educational eligibility norms to obtain lorry driving licence would be relaxed.

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## Heavy rain damages crops in Erode

*Staff Reporter*

Water logging in many areas in the district



*Rain impact: Banana crop in several parts of Erode district was damaged during the heavy rain on Wednesday. — PHOTO: M.GOVARTHAN*

Heavy rain accompanied by strong winds led to water logging and crop damage in several parts of Erode district on Wednesday.

Paddy cultivated on several acres of land in Gobichettipalayam and other blocks in the district went under a sheet of water. Banana crop cultivated on over 100 acres suffered extensive damage. Collector C. Kamaraj along with senior officials inspected the damaged crops.

Rain lasted for more than four hours in several parts of the district, leaving many residential colonies in Erode town, Perundurai and Gobichettipalayam water-logged.

Vehicular movement in Erode town was affected because of water stagnation on roads.

Heavy water logging was reported at the bus stand, market, Surampatty, Vasuki Nagar, Thillai Nagar, Municipal colony and Kollampalayam.

The situation was even worse in Perundurai as almost all drainage channels overflowed, flooding houses and shops. The Chinthamani co-operative super market was flooded with filthy water, causing damage to the products. “A section of the market was completely water-logged,” P. Sathish Babu, who was present at the market, said. “A few of us were not able to come out of the store due to water logging. We called the fire service and the police to help us. But none of them responded,” he said.

Power supply remained disrupted for several hours in most parts of the district. The Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation restored the power supply on Thursday morning.

Erode town recorded the maximum rainfall of 110 mm in the last 24 hour period ending at 8.30 a.m. on Thursday. The rainfall recorded in other parts of the district as follows (in mm) : Perundurai – 85, Pungampadi – 51, Kavunthapadi – 47.4, Olapalayam – 47, Arachalur – 45, Sivagiri – 45, Chennimalai – 38, Bhavani – 33.2, Orathupalayam Dam – 32, Sathyamangalam – 27, Gobichettipalayam – 24, Kodivery Dam – 24, Bhavanisagar – 18, Elanthakuttaimedu – 18 and Modakurichi – 15.

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## **Mealy bug attack on crops continues**

Special Correspondent

Horticulture Department urges farmers to take precautionary measures

The mealy bug attack in tapioca and other crops, which caused extensive losses to farmers last year, poses a threat this year too as there are indications of widespread presence of the bug across the district.

The Horticulture Department says that the attack is in the initial stages described as 'below the economic threshold level,' wherein the attack has not yet reached the stage of causing economic damages.

Nevertheless, the Department has appealed to farmers of the district to take up precautionary measures to check the spread of the bug. The bug attack leaves the crop with a coating of white powder, a manifestation of the extensive attack by the bug.

The mealy bug outbreak is largely noticed in tapioca, vegetable crops such as tomato and brinjal, mango, guava, sapota, crossandra and jasmine. Last year, tapioca growers were the worst hit as the attack caused a drastic fall in yield.

So much so that a majority of the farmers, who were attracted by the good profit that the crop gave them, have stopped raising the crop this year in Manapparai and Vaiyampatti areas, said A.Karuppanan, organiser, district farmers wing of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. "Over 90 per cent of the farmers in Manapparai and Vaiyampatti, who raised the crop last year, has not done so this year," he says.

A large number of farmers sustained heavy losses and struggling to recover. The bug attack left the crops devastated, Mr.Karuppanan said adding that the mealy bug attack could be seen this year too in the region in different crops. Though the district officials carried out a survey to assess the damage, no compensation was given to the affected farmers.

The Horticulture Department in association with scientists from the TNAU's Anbil Dharmalingam Agricultural College and Research Institute had conducted a few camps last year to sensitise tapioca growers to the methods of countering the bug attack through chemical application.

But farmers complain that the spraying of chemicals has not helped much. Subsequently, parasitoids were released in some fields as bio-control agents. But, the initiative was not extensive enough to eradicate the menace. The parasitoids have to be multiplied quickly and released on a large scale, says Mr.Karuppanan.

In a communication issued here on Wednesday T.Chandrasekaran, Deputy Director of Horticulture, Tiruchi, appealed to farmers precautionary measures including spraying of neem oil or neem kernel extract along with neem soap. He also suggested the spraying of chemicals twice in a gap of 15 days.

The mealy bug attack has been noticed in Marungapuri, Vaiyampatti, Manapparai, Musiri, Uppilliyapuram, Thuraiyur, Thathiyengarpet and Thottiyam blocks. As usual the bug attack is widespread in tapioca, which has been raised in about 2,000 hectares now.

Sources said the Department would consider organising special camps as last year to demonstrate the control measures to farmers. They also said release of the parasitoids would also be considered.



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# Paddy farmers plan stir over delay in payment of insurance

*Staff Reporter*

Compensation for losses suffered last year yet to be given



*Flooded: One of the paddy fields that was submerged during the second round of cultivation in Alappuzha last year. — File photo*

Paddy farmers who are yet to be paid insurance for the crop loss they suffered during the previous 'puncha' and second round of cultivations in Kuttanad have threatened to stage an indefinite hunger strike in front of the Secretariat if their demands were not met immediately.

Interacting with the media here on Thursday, the farmers, most of them from the Edampadam and Manamkari paddy polder councils under the Champakulam Krishi Bhavan, said the most devastating damage was in these two paddy polders, where ripe paddy spread over 78 hectares was completely submerged and lost.

Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, who was the Leader of Opposition then, had visited the area along with eight legislators and had promised to take up the issue.

The government later issued orders, announcing a sum of Rs.20,000 per hectare for crop that was insured and Rs.10,000 per hectare for crop that was not insured. However, the farmers were yet to be paid any sort of compensation, they alleged, and said that without the payment of the amount, they would be unable to launch preparations for the forthcoming 'puncha' season.

The farmers have submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister demanding immediate payment of the insurance; an increase in the minimum support price for paddy; and a reduction in the recently increased prices of fertilizers and pesticides. They said that if it was not initiated without further delay, they would launch a hunger fast in front of the Secretariat in the State capital.

## Non-cooperation strike

Meanwhile, the Kuttanad Vikasana Samithi (KVS) has demanded the government to intervene to end the non-cooperation strike by the pumping motor owners.

In a statement here, KVS executive director Thomas Peelianickal said tenders had been issued for 328 motors under the Kuttanad Package. Since these were being distributed without checking whether the beneficiaries already possessed motors, it would be the Motor Owners' Association, which currently supplies motors on rent in Kuttanad that would be affected.

The Samithi has demanded that the government intervene in the matter and ensure that only deserving farmers were given the motors.

Meanwhile, the strike by the Motor Owners' Association, as part of which motors were not being given out on rent to farmers, had affected pumping activities in Kuttanad's paddy fields, the Samithi said.



## Weather

Chennai - INDIA

### Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Rain: 0.2 mm in 24hrs

Humidity: 75%

Wind: Normal

### Friday, Aug 19

Max Min  
35.6° | 24.7°

Sunrise: 5:56

Sunset: 18:28

Barometer: 1003

### Tomorrow's Forecast








Rainy

### Saturday, Aug 20

Max Min  
32° | 23°

Extended Forecast for a week

Sunday Aug 21	Monday Aug 22	Tuesday Aug 23	Wednesday Aug 24	Thursday Aug 25
				
29°   26° Rainy	29°   26° Rainy	31°   25° Rainy	31°   26° Rainy	30°   26° Rainy

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## THE ECONOMIC TIMES

# Global sugar prices will decide Bajaj Hindusthan's fortunes

Bajaj Hindusthan, the country's largest sugar company by capacity, has continued to post triple-digit net profit growth in the third quarter of the current sugar season, largely due to lower raw material costs. It has outperformed its peers by retaining topline growth close to 50% in the past two quarters. However, the stock of the company has not budged, which is partially explained by the downturn in the sugar cycle.

The company's revenue rose 47% due to stable realisations. A stock adjustment in the current quarter reduced its operating cost to negligible levels during the quarter, which spruced up operating margin by 900 basis points from a year ago.

However, with the expansion in the power segment, Bajaj Hindusthan has continued to record higher interest outlay since the past two quarters. Despite this, the company earned a marginal net profit of Rs 1 crore compared with a loss of Rs 14 crore a year ago.

Although sugar companies are able to make reasonable profits, the fundamentals of the sector look grim due to better production estimates in the current sugar season (October'10-September'11). As per latest estimates by ISMA, the sugar association, the estimated sugar production in the domestic market is 25 million tonnes compared to 23 million tonnes of the consumption.

On the international front, Brazil is expected to record a 3% decline as per UNICA over the last year, which can push up the raw sugar prices in the international market. The drop in the international sugar market production may result in an export rally from India. If that happens, it would help domestic sugar prices to stay firm, thereby supporting profitability of Indian sugar companies.

The outlook of the company depends upon the sugar realisation, which is expected to trade in the range of 28-30 per kg in the coming quarters since the production is going to be higher in the current sugar season. At the trailing price-earnings (P/E) ratio of 9.7, the stock's valuation is lower than the average industry P/E of 13. Investors need to wait for the uptrend in the sugar cycle to take an exposure in the company.

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## Business Standard

### Sugar ends mixed in thin trade

Medium sugar prices improved slightly at the Vashi wholesale market here today on better retail offtake.

While, small sugar variety finished almost flat owing to poor buying interest.

Medium sugar (M-30) moved up by Rs 5 per quintal to Rs 2,791/2,951 from overnight close of Rs 2,786/2,951. Small sugar (S-30), however softened to 2,735/2,792 per quintal, as compared to Rs 2,736/2,792 yesterday.

The following are today's closing rates for sugar (per quintal), with the previous rates given in brackets:

Medium sugar (M-30) quality: Rs 2,791/2,951 (Rs 2,786/2,951)

Small sugar (S-30) quality: Rs 2,735/2,792 (Rs 2,736/2,792)

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