

## FOR ANAMALAI TRIBES, IT'S STILL AN URBAN BLIGHT

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A view of the Kattupatti tribal settlement.

Residents of two tribal settlements within the limits of the Anamalai Tiger Reserve (ATR), around 100 km from Coimbatore city, were gearing up for the annual festival of their local deity, Vairapattan, on Thursday.

The Kattupatti and Kuzhipatti settlements of the Pulayar community, together having 150 families, have barely heard of COVID-19. But residents are aware that people living outside the forests, especially in cities, have been affected by a disease called "corona".

Though the tribal families live a secluded life, the fear of the pandemic has gripped them, too.

"Very few people from our settlements go to the towns and that too only for emergency needs. After coming to know about the new disease due to which people are wearing masks, we have reduced such visits," says S. Selvi, 37, a mother of three from the Kattupatti settlement.

She said it was a 7-km walk through the jungle to reach Upper Aliyar, from where they took buses to Attakatti. To reach the Primary Health Centre (PHC) at Erisinampatti, coming under Udumalpet block of Tiruppur district, they had to travel about 34 km.

Nurses from the PHC made monthly visits to the settlement for the care of pregnant women and newborns.

"We were told that the PHC would enroll us for a new *thaduppoosi* (vaccine). But we do not know much about it," added another resident.

Very few people from these settlements have had school education like Ms. Selvi's second son Murali, who completed his SSLC and an ITI course.

"First of all, residents of remote tribal settlements lack awareness about COVID-19. The Health Department should take efforts to have a dialogue with them to create awareness about the pandemic," said S. Thanraj from the Ekta Parishad, Tamil Nadu, which recently distributed cotton washable masks to tribal families in the ATR.

Meanwhile, the Forest Department arranged for the vaccination of 300 men from different tribal communities who work as frontline staff, according to Arockiaraj Xavier, Deputy Field Director of ATR. "Efforts are being made to take the initiative in all settlements in the Pollachi Division of the ATR," he added.

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