

Land Question And The Tribals Of Kerala

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Abstract: The paper seeks to examine the land question of tribals in Kerala, India. In the context of developing countries such as India, the state of Kerala has often been cited as a model. Notable among its achievements is the good health indicator in terms of mortality and fertility rates and high levels of utilization of formal health services and cent percent literacy. Later, it was observed that this model has several outlier communities in which tribal communities were the most victimized ones. The tribals are children of nature and their lifestyle is conditioned by the Ecosystem. After the sixty years of formation of the state tribals continues as one of the most marginalized community within the state, the post globalised developmental projects and developmental dreams of the state has again made the deprivation of the tribals of Kerala and the developmental divide has increased between the tribal and non-tribal in the state. The paper argues that deprivation of land and forests are the worst forms of oppression that these people experience.

Index Terms: Land, Tribals, India, Kerala, Globalization, Government, Alienation

1 INTRODUCTION

The forest occupies a central position in tribal culture and economy. India is also characterized by having second largest tribal (Adivasis) population in the world. It is ironical that the poorest people of India are living in the areas of richest natural resources. According the 2011 census, tribals constitute 8.2% of the total population of the country. The tribal people of India are called "Scheduled Tribes" in the Indian Constitution. In India, 461 ethnic groups are recognized as Scheduled Tribes, and these are considered to be India's indigenous peoples. In mainland India, the Scheduled Tribes are usually referred to as Adivasis, which literally means indigenous peoples. The largest concentrations of indigenous peoples are found in the seven states of north-east India, and the so-called "central tribal belt" stretching from Rajasthan to West Bengal.

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- Muttanga is a wild life sanctuary in Wayanadu district was capture and tribal were started living it the land over there under the leader the banner of Adivasi Kshema Samithi, an adivasi organization, on February 19 2003 at Muthanga forests they were fired the people including women, children and elderly by police and brutally evicted from the that land by the state government, One tribal was killed in the police firing, while many others were wounded. A policeman who was held hostage by the tribals was also killed in the fight. Apart from these there were other small struggles for land across the state but all of them where suppressed by the state government, these shows how state has delt with the issue of adivasis and their demands.
- Chengara is a local place in the Patthanamtitta district of the state, where about 300 families of Adivasis, Dalits and other landless people converged on the rubber estate owned by Harrison's Malayalam Plantation Ltd and thatched sheds there and started living there demanding for the land for cultivation and financial assistance for each family after 790 days of straggle they demands were adjusted and they were informed that they will be given land and financial assistance which is yet to be given

There are over 700 Scheduled Tribes notified under Article 342 of the Constitution of India, spread over different States and Union Territories of the country. Tribals are among the most deprived and oppressed sections of India. Gender bias and gender oppression has meant that Adivasi women are worst affected. Half of the adivasi people do not have land. India has several laws and constitutional provisions, such as the Fifth Schedule for mainland India and the Sixth Schedule for certain areas of north-east India, which recognize indigenous peoples' rights to land and self-governance. The laws aimed at protecting indigenous peoples have, however, numerous shortcomings and their implementation is far from satisfactory. Kerala is one of the smallest states in the Indian union. It occupies 1 per cent of the total land area of India with a population of 3.33 Crore, which is 3 % of the total population of India at the 2011 census. Since the late 1970's a number of international scholars have held up the South Indian State of Kerala as a "Model of Development" (Ratcliffe 1978, Amin 1991, Frank and Chasin 1994). Kerala model is defined as the Kerala's high standard of living (comparable to US or Europe) at very low per capita income which is only 1/80th of US citizens per capita income. The basic characteristic of the Kerala Model is the high level of social development and physical social quality of life disproportionate to its level of economic development. Kerala holds a unique position in the tribal map of India. Tribals in Kerala commonly called as "Adivasis" are the indigenous population found in dense forest and mountains of Western Ghats mainly bordering the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The 2011 Census report records the overall tribal population in the state as 4, 84,839, against 3, 64,189 in 2001, putting the decadal growth rate at 0.36 per cent. There are 36 tribal communities across Kerala and "Paniya" tribes are the biggest tribe among them. The tribal communities in Kerala have been historically marginalized and oppressed by various development factors and forces. The policies and schemes implemented by successive governments at the Centre and the state have further worsened the situation. The challenges to their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights have been critical today, insofar as they perpetuate extreme form of deprivation in many ways. Their customary rights over natural resources such as forests, cultural identity and traditional knowledge including intellectual property rights, cultural heritage and traditional wisdom have been continuously at stake due to the interplay of various factors and forces. The present paper

only focusing the land alienation of tribal's in Kerala.2
Procedure for Paper Submission

2 Defining a Tribe

The word 'tribe' is generally used for a "socially cohesive unit, associated with a territory, the members of which regard them as politically autonomous" (Mitchell, 1979: 232). Often a tribe possesses a distinct dialect and distinct cultural traits. The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1911, defines a tribe as a "collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so". According to R.N. Mukherjee, 'A tribe is that human group, whose members have common interest, territory, language, social law and economic occupation'.

3 Problems of Tribals in Kerala

Highest concentration of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala is seen in Wayanad district (37.36 %) followed by Idukki (14 %) and Palakkad (10.8 %). In Kerala, adivasis constitute 1.1 percent to total population. The adivasis in Kerala are not only geographically concentrated, but are overwhelmingly rural. The celebrated Kerala model of development has not made much change for the socio-economic life of the marginalized sections of Kerala. Extreme levels of poverty, deprivation and vulnerability, High levels of exclusion, both developmental and social, Extreme low levels of empowerment (political, social and economic, Rapid marginalization due to unfair, unequal and exploitative relations of production, and exchange between tribal communities and others, Low level of access to entitlements, Practically zero participation in development matters with no autonomy in any form of decision making, Abnormally huge siphoning of developmental resources and benefits meant for tribal people by middlemen, Poor human development with low levels of literacy and access to health care, Rapid alienation of assets like land, Alarming depletion of social capital, especially traditional forms of organization and leadership, Quick deterioration of traditional knowledge systems and cultural attainments, Fast-increasing tendency to use tribal people as cat's-paws in criminal activities like illicit distillation, cultivation of narcotic plants, stealing of forest wealth, etc., High levels of exploitation of women by outsiders, Weak delivery system of public services, Dependency-inducing developmental programmes relying on distribution of benefits, rather than building up of capabilities, Implementation of ad hoc and stereo-typed developmental programmes in the absence of proper planning, Very weak monitoring systems etc are the problems faced by the tribal community.

4 Land Question and Tribals in Kerala

Alienation of land is a serious problem faced by the scheduled tribes. Land is the mainstay of the tribals and more than 90 per cent of them are dependent on agriculture and allied activities. Hence, land is the only tangible asset of a tribal community, and they are emotionally attached to it. The number of landless tribals has increased during the last decade and several reasons can be attributed to this phenomenon. Scheduled tribes largely depend upon non-tribals to meet their credit requirements. The socio-economic survey of tribals, reveals that tribals alienate their

lands mainly for meeting their domestic expenses and for clearing their past debts. The main causes of land alienation and landlessness among the tribals are poor economic conditions, drinking habit, indebtedness, urbanization, industrialization, lack of land records, administrative inefficiency, delay in getting judgement, oral mortgage of lands in the hands of non-tribals, non-possession of Judgement, interest not shown by tribal pleaders or not taking interest due to heavy bribe, fear from police and court establishing marriage with tribal women and share cropping. land alienation has given birth to several allied problems among the tribals, ie; increased poverty among the tribals, decreased the occasion of employment, migration of tribals, exploitation of tribal labourers, exploitation of tribal women, created tension between tribals and non-tribals, increased the distance between the rich and the poor tribals, developed extremism and naxalism in tribal areas, brought law and order problem in tribal areas, directly or indirectly and brought the incidence of beggary and prostitution in the tribal areas. In post-independent Kerala, large-scale alienation of tribal lands took place mainly due to the immigration of plainsmen to the hill areas, displacement for projects etc. The historic Kerala Land Reforms Act 1963, with its 'land to the tiller' policy unfortunately turned out to be a nightmare for the adivasis. Under the new law, the occupiers of the land (settler farmers) became the owners and the original owners (the tribals) became landless and were reduced to the status of agricultural labourers. This resulted in the total derailment of their life. After the enactment of Kerala Land Reform Act, the non-tribal communities who invaded Attapady and Wayanad behaved ruthlessly towards the adivasis who are the real owners of the land. They exploited the adivasis more unscrupulously than their former rivals, the British or landlords. The new masters and the government bypassed the dalit and adivasi labourers by focusing on giving land rights to tenants only. In fact it was the apathetic attitude displayed by successive governments that made the issue more complicated. Thus the adivasi issue in Kerala presents a dismal picture. As the government remained indifferent, the Adivasis have from time to time tried to assert their land rights but were brutally crushed by unleashing the state violence as at Cheengeri (1995) and Panavally (1997). Muthanga and Chengara. The celebrated Kerala model of development has not made much change for the socio-economic life of the marginalized sections of Kerala. According to Chathukulam and John, 'tribals have been largely left out of the gains of the vaunted Kerala model of development' (2006). According to Kunjaman (2002) systematic marginalization of the subaltern sections has been a blot on the Kerala model. In the implementation of land reforms, the fundamental programme for which Kerala is well known, the legitimate claim of the dalits, the traditional tillers of the soil, to cultivable land was never recognized. Among the few states that have achieved land reforms in India Kerala has been rated very high. However, it is equally true that Kerala did not achieve complete success in land reforms. Land alienation started in the 1950s. In the meantime, the tribals acknowledge the fact that mobilization without any individual interest and ideological aspect can successfully address their real unrest in front of others. Therefore, when analyzing the recent history of tribal unrest and their

discontent towards the state, the movements and mobilizations play a tremendous role. The adoption of New Social Movements (NSM) contributes much to articulate the tribal people to fight against their plight of marginalization and landlessness which would cause them to lose their identity. Amartya Sen is absolutely correct in holding that such groups should mobilize themselves on the basis of the problems specific to them. After all, in the absence of a revolution, such group specific actions are the only means of improving their conditions. Sen's thesis on group-specific mobilization based on basic issues stands vindicated (Sen 1999). In the recent past, Kerala witnessed the rise of land struggles from landless agricultural workers and Scheduled Tribes. The Muthanga agitation in Wayanad in 2005 was led by the tribes. Similarly, the landless set, mostly Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, conducted the Chengara land struggle between 2001 and 2010. Indeed, these struggles and mobilization are the real fight of those who toiled in land and asserting their right to own sustainable land in a society that professes equality and fraternity. According to International Centre for Anthropological Studies (AICAS), in Attappady alone, over 10,796.19 acres had been alienated from tribes people between 1960 and 80, reportedly the highest in the. A common feature shared by most of the tribal people is their remoteness and marginal quality of territorial resources. In the past, exploitation of such poor regions was found both difficult and uneconomic. But, the recent rapid technological advancement and unrivalled economic and political strength of world capitalism, and the rising power of neo-colonialism through the G-8 directly and the IMF, WB, IBRD, etc., as agencies, have created favourable conditions for the evasion and extraction of natural resources from the ecologically fragile territories of tribal people. Thus, forced evictions of tribals to make way for mammoth capital-intensive development projects have become a distressing routine and ever-increasing phenomenon. Tribal lands are rich in hydrologic and other resources. And it easily makes them the most attractive sites to locate development projects of various kinds. For multinational companies looking for investment opportunities these areas are fast becoming favorite destinations (Hari, Nohan Mathur). Illegal acquisition of land by private sector companies like Suzlon (that erected 31 windmills in Palakkad district) is a classic example. Displacement for projects has resulted in greater landlessness for tribals. There is no reliable and complete information on the number of tribals displaced in the country since independence. The study of Jose Murickan and others (2003) highlights some of the displacement figures among tribals in Kerala. The Idamalayar project displaced between 100 and 150 tribal families. Sixty seven percent of those displaced in the Pooyamkutty hydroelectric project were tribals. The Neriampalam hydel project displaced 150 tribal families. The Periyar Tiger Reserve displaced fourteen tribal families. The rehabilitation package for these families was also denied because they had no documents for land in their possession. Despite epochal laws and Supreme Court orders, restoration of tribal land remains a mirage. In this context, the need for another land reform is enquired and analyzed. Both these sections have been considered only as eligible for charity and welfare. They have never been recognized as active players in development. Their contributions to the development of the

state are seldom recognized. The post globalised developmental projects and developmental dreams of the state has again made the deprivation of the tribals of Kerala and the developmental divide has increased between the tribal and non-tribal in the state.

5 Conclusion and Suggestions

Despite government initiatives and developmental projects the existing socio-economic profile of the tribal communities is low compared to the mainstream population. All forms of social exclusion and a high degree of deprivation are the major problems faced by the tribal community in Kerala. The Constitution of India makes special provisions for socio-economic development of the tribal groups. It is also a fact that pre-independent and post independent governments in our state could not and did not do much for the upliftment of the marginalized groups. The actions of successive governments in Kerala unfortunately failed to solve the tribal issues. These groups have very limited capability to act as strong pressure groups in Kerala politics, because of the poor organizational strength; and bargaining power (Parayil and Sreekumar 2003). Consequent to this, the political bodies seldom take care of their concerns. Therefore the government should take steps towards developmental activities in all oorus, including provisions for water supply, bus services and roads, constitute a "Special Land Tribunal" to redress the grievances related to land alienations and Prevention of any further alienation of adivasi lands, ensure that the adivasis have full and complete control over their lands and its produce and various insidious practices of non-adivasis to take control of the land and their produce should be dealt with firmly.

6 References

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