

Resource Appropriation; Politics Of Exclusion Of Adivasis In 'Kerala Model Development'

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(Author is Working on the Relocation of
Kattunayakans of Wayanad, Kerala,
the paper has used both primary and secondary
data of field visit for the study).

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ABSTRACT

When it comes to social development, Kerala has been the center of attention. This has been greatly debated all throughout the world. However, whether or not adivasis has been integrated in the developmental process is debatable. This study investigates how adivasis have been marginalized from the community's social and political growth. The study also analyses how the state has contributed to the marginalization of adivasis by obstructing legislation aimed at securing rights to land and forests. The important discussion on the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restoration on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act, 1975, and the Forest Rights Act of 2006, demonstrates how the state actively attempts to marginalize them.

KEYWORDS : Kerala model development, forest rights, marginalization, adivasis, land alienation.

Introduction

Large-scale investments in the social sector, as well as the equitable distribution of land among people in rural regions, where the vast majority of people have historically relied, have resulted in remarkable social development, despite the fact that economic growth has remained significantly low. This pattern of development is characterized as the "Kerala model development," since it combines high levels of social development with low levels of economic growth and per capita income (Kjosavik, D. J., & Shanmugaratnam, N. 2004).

Kerala accounts for only 2.76 percent of the country's overall population. However, the state's development outpaced that of American and European countries like as Canada, Germany, Russia, and others. Kerala has made great progress in the areas of literacy rate 93.91 percent (Males 96.02 percent and Females 91.98 percent), sex ratio (female 1084 male 1000) and infant mortality 12 deaths per 1000 live births (Census India, 2011). Several elements contributed to the current Kerala model. The Kerala development model was invariably centered on poverty eradication, land reform, access to education, and the improvement of people's social welfare. Politically engaged citizenry, via various social initiatives, contributed to the establishment of the Kerala model development during the previous several decades. (Steuer, 2009).

The exclusion of underprivileged sections of society, such as adivasis and fishermen, from its developmental yardsticks is a major criticism of the Kerala model. Whereas other communities reap all of the benefits, these groups have typically been on the outside looking in. Despite the development of policies and initiatives, the outcomes of these programs are disappointing.

Adivasis and 'others'

There are several communities such as Muslims, Christians, and Hindu caste communities, the majority of which have historically been marginalized in the nation. However, in Kerala, these communities have vast amounts of power and wealth to share. When we look at these communities, we can see that the characteristics that assisted these communities that were lacking in adivasis benefitted them enormously. The gulf migration, religious reform movements, and political upliftment all aided Kerala's Muslim community. The religious community's efforts in educational development and other social sectors were successful in Christian communities.

Reformist movements from various Hindu cast communities, such as Nair Service Society (NSS) and Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham (SNDP), assisted their respective groups in reaching new heights. The politically driven momentum in these reformist movements converted these communities into a power group with the ability to bargain with and pressurize the state for their upliftment. Although there are activities carried out by other communities, such as Dalits, such as the Ayyankali movement, they are unable to sustain their momentum due to a lack of social and political capital. As a result, it did not benefit the community

in the future as others did. Adivasis and fishermen are Kerala's most marginalized minority, owing to their inability to take their reform initiatives to the next level in order to benefit the group (Tharakan, 2006). True, community reformist movements have played a significant part in defining Kerala model development as well as community upliftment via many elements of development.

In India, there are a variety of particular measures for the preservation of scheduled tribes, their well-being, and their inclusion in development. Despite these safeguards, scheduled tribes continue to face exclusion and marginalization, as seen by the poor performance of human development metrics. Among human development metrics, the scheduled tribal population ranks quite low (World Bank Report, 2011).

According to the Report of the High-Level Committee on the Socioeconomic, Health, and Educational Status of Tribal Communities in India (Xaxa et al. 2014), scheduled tribes are among the poorest and most disadvantaged segments of Indian society. Although they constitute just around 8.6 percent of the population, they disproportionately represent those living below the poverty line, have low literacy, and have severely limited access to health care.

Human Development Indicators: National-State-Adivasi comparison

Index	Kerala	India	Kerala Tribal Status
Literacy Rate	93.9	74.4	74.44
Female literacy	91.98	64.6	70.15
Male literacy	96.2	80.9	78.90
Infant mortality rate	11	46.07	64
Expectancy of Life	68	61	66.4

(Compiled from Census of India, 2011 and Scheduled tribes of Kerala-Report on the Socio-economic status)

The table above depicts how tribal life in Kerala state is in deplorable condition across all human development metrics.

According to a report provided to the Kerala legislative assembly by Minister Radhakrishnan, one adivasi was attacked in two days in Kerala. According to the report, 165 complaints were filed in Kerala between May 2021 and June, 2022.

Development and adivasis.

In Kerala, two primary sources of adivasi marginalization are landlessness and land alienation. Modernity-led policies, the emergence of a plantation economy, and migration set the way for these reasons. The establishment of a British plantation in Kerala's highlands paved the way for migration and land invasion by newcomers. The adivasis of Kerala's northern highlands, Wayanad, were victims of migration and plantations. Despite the fact that the government had implemented several laws, regulations, and programs to prevent encroaching on adivasi lands since the 1960s, settlers had already organized as highly strong groups to block any governmental attempts to make encroachment legalized through political backing. To put it another way, the state's protective discrimination benefitted exclusively settlers. As a result, adivasis became settlers' slaves and a community that relied solely on government handouts (Sreekumar and Parayil, 2002).

The adivasis of Kerala's lowlands, on the other hand, enjoyed a superior living environment than those in Wayanad. Although they were exposed to exploitation and estrangement from outsiders, it was not to the magnitude of Wayanad's suffering. Meanwhile, Travancore state's protective measures made them a powerful settled adivasi farming community. Among them were the adivasi communities of Mala Aryan, Mannan, and Kanikar. Education advancements and increased access to other socioeconomic resources have resulted them in a well-mobilized community among other adivasi communities inside the state. These groups have gained the ability and strength to negotiate their ambitions with state and political parties in recent decades. The political articulation of these groups also serves as a model for breaking down the vulnerabilities of the disadvantaged population in a politically heated environment (Abhilash, T. 2020).

Kerala's land reforms were another watershed moment in Kerala society's socioeconomic mobility. The underprivileged populations, including adivasis, fishers, and Dalits, did not profit as much as other people from land reform. According to the studies, most adivasis did not gain from Kerala's land reforms (Mathur 1977, Bijoy 1999).

It is true that the communist party was instrumental in bringing about land reform in Kerala. However, the party's approach to adivasis in land reform implementation should be debated. The party's principal aim was to unite farmers and workers for the interest of the party. This agenda also included Adivasis. As argued by C.K Janu;

“Farmland, better living condition, none of this was part of the party agenda. When I was a farm laborer, I used to attend party classes. I had felt that there was something different about the way of talking there. If we tried to present any of our problems, it was usually avoided with the excuse that it had to be considered by the higher committee. E.M.S also took class. In our area, the party, landlords, and plantation owners had all grown together and joined like a huge tree. To deal with problems of our existence, and to work for it, became impossible for the party. Not only that, the mainstream party people looked upon us as mere land labourers. Therefore, the party needed us only to shout slogans, partake in meetings, and at times of voting only. The party workers behaved very badly towards women in our community. This was no different the behavior of mainstream society” (Usha Menon, 2001).

Though there are a variety of reasons for the failure to achieve the goals of adivasis in land reforms, the most crucial were that the state and political parties viewed the legal pattern of lands as being similar to the colonial system, which was based on private property. The link between adivasis and lands, their ambitions, values, and traditions were not understood holistically in accordance with their eco system. As a result, they have been marginalized by land changes as well (Suresh, M. 2020).

As previously said, even in the post-reform age, more than three times, the population of Kerala is landless. The subject of why and how adivasis are still far behind the rest of the population in terms of landlessness must be addressed. During land reforms, adivasis are treated equally with others such as scheduled castes and the general population in terms of means and production relations. Whereas, the traditional land tenure, relationships, and system of engagements of adivasis were not taken into account. As a result, any regulations establishing "forest commons" are not included. The forest commons were the ancient land involvement system of adivasis, through which they conducted their livelihood and lives. The inclusion of such provisions would have improved adivasi land concerns. In other words, the government evaluated land reforms solely in terms of private and state property regimes, completely

disregarding adivasi perspectives on land tenure and interactions (Kjosavik, D. J., & Shanmugaratnam, N. 2004).

Furthermore, the loopholes created in land reforms to preserve the interests of settlers and land owners resulted in a large degree of land alienation of adivasis in Kerala, particularly in Wayanad. The goal of the land ceiling in land reform was to distribute surplus lands. This also did not aid adivasis for a variety of reasons. One is that the government was unable to identify much excess land in Kerala's highlands because, while those land ceiling laws were envisioned in 1957, their execution began in the 1970s, allowing landlords to transfer their properties to family members and others.

Moreover, the validity of land reform to shift private woods to plantations contributed in the loss of forest areas and resources to adivasis. This is one of the most severe incidences of landlessness among adivasis in Kerala's highlands. Despite the complexity and loopholes, the state has bought some excess lands to allocate to adivasis. Some lands were awarded to adivasis on paper as well, but because to the difficulty of the paperwork, those families were unable to assume possession of the properties. More crucially, the extra lands allotted to adivasis were dispersed throughout numerous locations. They were hesitant to relocate to dispersed regions since their lives were centered on group living with communities. As a result, adivasis were too hesitant to participate in this because of their traditional village-based living style with their communities (Kjosavik, D. J., & Shanmugaratnam, N. 2004).

However, Raman (2002) pointed out that the problem of land availability and distribution might have been solved if the government had been willing to hand the lands to the huge plantations, which had a vast number of uncultivated fields. But governments were not ready.

It cannot be assumed that the failure of land reforms, policies, and legislations on adivasis occurred in any accidental way. The state has done this on purpose. The Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restoration on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act, 1975, provided an excellent example on that of governmental engagement.

According to the Act, all adivasi land transactions that happened between 1960 and 1982 are invalid and would be returned to adivasis. According to the report of a sub-committee formed by the Kerala legislative assembly in 1976 on land alienation in

Wayanad district, it was discovered that in total 298 cases, adivasi lands were taken by force from adivasis in 71 cases, lands were snatched by paying a little amount in 67 cases, and lands were grabbed by forging documents in 14 cases. The cases themselves demonstrate how adivasi lands have been stolen and alienated from adivasis. Therefore, the KST Act of 1975 was a watershed moment in the restoration of all-alienated lands (Bijoy, C. R. 1999). For the last few years, this has been one of the key demands of adivasi groups to fully implement the act in its full spirit.

What role the Kerala governments played in not implementing the legislation was significant. Despite the fact that the Act was enacted in 1975, both Communist and Congress-led administrations used various justifications to avoid implementing it. The intention of governments was to protect the interests of settlers and landowners rather than adivasis. As a result, different governments passed different ordinances at various periods to change the Act's contents. However, the president vetoed the modifications since the state could not offer a persuasive response on the validity of the amendments (Bijoy, C. R. 1999, Rajeevan, R. 2011).

Despite the government's numerous excuses for failing to implement the legislation, the high court intervened many times to prevent the drama of governments for not being implemented. The court also concluded that the government had no intention of enforcing the Act. After numerous dramas and battles with the people and the courts, the government adopted the Kerala Restriction on Transfer by and Restoration of Lands to Scheduled Tribes Bill, 1999. According to this statute, only land larger than two hectares would be restored, while alternate land on alienated lands less than two hectares would be provided elsewhere. Whereas the KST Act of 1975 forbids all land transactions since 1982, the Act of 1999 exempts lands alienated between 1982 and 1986 up to 2 hectares (Bijoy, C. R. 1999, Front line, 2001, Khan, A. 2014). A law that was defeated by another law only to protect the interests of encroachers.

There is broad agreement that policy failures and a lack of inclusion in policy frameworks are the primary causes of adivasis underdevelopment. It is not true that the very exclusionary policy framework constructs and functions consciously and systematic effort of the state through legislations causes profound marginalization of adivasis. It is particularly evident in the case of Kerala's KST Act, 1975. The state never accepts responsibility for such actions because it is far more convenient to blame policy and

regulations. In a state like Kerala, where historic land reforms were executed, a paradigm of development based on low economic growth benefited all other populations except adivasis. As a result, it is evident that the argument that the Kerala model is pro-poor is purely rhetoric, and it most certainly is not. The Kerala model has only made adivasis victims of its growth; consequently, romanticizing and celebrating the Kerala model's inclusion is a sham to conceal the injustices suffered by adivasis thus far.

The marginalization of adivasis is a result of state related causes as well as historical precedent. This was significantly impacted by pre- and post-governmental policies, which changed how lands were used, how food was produced, and how people engaged with the forests in their traditional ways that had existed since the dawn of humanity. Adivasis were somewhat displaced from their native environment, nevertheless. However, that is accomplished by the existing voluntary relocation policy put in place for conservation objectives. Attempts are made to relocate adivasis from the forest to the outside through the voluntary relocation program, which has been in place in Wayanad for more than 10 years. The adivasis were forced out of the forest and relocated outside as a result. Misery is embellished with injustice, which begun with obtaining land ownership and ends with losing land.

In the history of forest laws and adivasis, the forest Rights Acts (FRA), 2006, was a landmark piece of legislation. It attempted to reestablish the scheduled tribes' and forest residents' rights to utilize, control, and manage the forest resources, which had been revoked for the previous few decades by colonial and post-colonial administrations. By doing this, the FRA hoped to make up for the past wrong done to adivasis. As a result, FRA acknowledges both individual and collective land use rights of people in order to support their livelihood and incorporate conservation sustainably (Münster et al, 2012).

According to the National Tiger Conservation Authority's (NTCA) 2008 guidelines, the removal of adivasis from the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary has been ongoing. Wayanad wildlife Sanctuary is not recognized as a tiger reserve or a crucial habitat for wildlife, nevertheless. But relocation takes place here in accordance with NTCA rules. The national tiger conservation authority (NTCA) is in charge of managing and protecting tiger reserves across the nation. For the households being evicted from the protected regions, the NTCA has been sponsoring rehabilitation program. Expansion of protected areas that are unaffected by humans is the

main goal of the NTCA. As a result, tiger forests have quadrupled and rapidly expanded over the past several decades.

Relocations are only permitted from tiger reserves, in accordance with the NTCA's agreed-upon rules. The NTCA has not yet approved the relocation of any additional protected areas. Relocations, on the other hand, have taken place from wildlife sanctuaries. As a result, the relocation that has been repeatedly reported from various wildlife sanctuaries, such as the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary in Kerala, the Barnawapara and Boradeo Wildlife Sanctuary in Chhattisgarh, and the Chandaka-Dompara and Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary in Odisha and many other, does not adhere to the regulation. It is still unclear how and why relocations are taking place in certain regions due to the lack of relocation regulations (Fanari, E. 2019).

Although, the FRA and Wild Life Protection Act of 2006 stipulates that a number of rights and recognition must be resolved prior to the relocation. The rights are, the rights must be recognized, the government has come to the conclusion that cohabitation cannot be achieved at any cost, resettlement package must be developed for the community, Community's free and informed permission for resettlement and rehabilitation, the process of restoration and resettlement have to be carried out by the gramme Sabha, and before moving, the rehabilitation and land distribution must be finished.

However, Wayanad's experiences throughout the interviews with people indicate that these are not preserved following the move. Furthermore, they are completely unaware of their rights. Because, despite FRA's assurances, they currently have no rights within the sanctuary and cannot maintain such rights, despite FRA's assurances. As narrated by Vijayan from Ponkuzhi settlement;

"No one has told us that we have rights in the forests, and we are told you would receive a better life, infrastructure, and decent employment outside if you moved there. Even the processes for moving outdoors are unknown to us; one day, someone may inquire if you're prepared or not, and we are unaware of any forest rights. We've been informed that when you moved away, you wouldn't have to worry about elephant or other wild animal attacks. To be honest, we want to stay here and live here instead of leaving. If the state and the forest department can stop the problems we face, we can live here peacefully. The forest department is not interested in hearing about our issues or our

suggestions on how to end the challenges we experience. The government and the forest department should investigate how the problems of wild animal attacks and other issues have become more prevalent recently in areas where we humans have lived for generations without many issues. These issues are brought on by tourism and other harms done to forests by destroying forests and the balance of forests, which in turn invites difficulties”.

Furthermore, the government and forest department in Wayanad halt all development operations in adivasi villages designated for relocation. The government hopes that by not providing any development, adivasis will flee the area. During the settlement visits, numerous adivasis expressed the same viewpoint. Furthermore, if they engage in any developing activity, the forest administration charges them with violating forest restrictions. As a result, on the one hand, the government claims to be conducting solely voluntary relocations, while in reality, they are forcing residents to leave the area due to a lack of suitable development. It is completely against FRA and relocation guidelines.

During the field tour, I also saw adivasi people who had previously been relocated from forests to the outside world living in deplorable conditions due to a lack of basic utilities and infrastructure in their new homes. Most of them have also retreated to the forest, living with family members by avoiding forest authorities. Because their lives, religion, culture, livelihood, and customs are dependent on forests. There are adivasis suffer mental and physical issues as a result of displacement. The government and the forest department do not realize that relocation and adaption to a new environment are difficult for adivasis.

The new kind of 'exclusion' drives adivasis even farther into marginalization. Meanwhile, the Kerala model has not only excluded adivasis from its developmental machinery, but it has also openly supported the removal of adivasis from their lands through illegal means. The story of Kerala's growth demonstrates that, even when democracy, justice, and progress are well established, it is easy to comprehend how the chasm between the strong and the downtrodden may be so wide.

CONCLUSION.

By evaluating the Kerala model development, this paper examined how the state's adivasis were purposely excluded from the developmental machinery. Despite the fact that there are historical reasons for their marginalization, which were even

fostered by previous and subsequent governments, the state has never taken anything to correct the wrong. As a result, the inclusiveness of Kerala model development discriminates against adivasis. Different times, distinct reasons, varied alienation, and different governmental and political assistance prepared the road of marginalization for adivasis. As Suresh observed, post-colonial administrations ignored the politics of adivasi lands, and their relationships were never effectively addressed and explained. As a result, according to the official and political procedure through which tenants acquired title of the property, adivasis were not recognized as tenants. The procedure and methods utilized only legitimized the ownership of migrants, not adivasis, because they lack state-legitimized documentation. As a result, the urgent requirement is to alter the state's policy and need of revise existing legislation to adivasis, in which civil society and political parties can play critical roles. The development should occur through recognizing and incorporating adivasi knowledges, customs, and values on their living balance. This neglected bridge has to be repaired right away.

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