

Rethinking Tribe in Indian Context

Realities, Issues and Challenges

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C HAPTER 8

The Need for Promoting Indigenous Indicators to Tribal Development

A Case Study of the Paniyan Tribe from Kerala

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One may start with the following statements about Kerala development scenario:

The fact that the Indian (federal) State of Kerala has achieved impressively high life expectancy, low fertility, and high literacy and so on despite its low income level per head is certainly an achievement worth celebrating and learning from. And yet the question remains as to why Kerala has not been able to consolidate on its successes in human development to raise its income level as well, which would have made its success more complete. As it is, it can scarcely serve as a 'model' as some have tried to claim (Sen 1999).

'Kerala Model', actually refers to the 'average' situation. Only the central tendency of the distribution of the indicators is used to establish the point.

However as in all distributions, the 'Kerala Model' also has its 'outliers' represented by communities that seem to have been left out of the domain of public action for what Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen have referred to as 'capability building' (Kurien 1995). Two points of consideration would emerge from the above arguments. The first is to recognise Kerala's development experience as a success story of development practised and public policy-making, which have resulted in its high Human Development Index (HDI). The second one is the realisation that even such a development experience can't be called as a model and can end up focusing on central tendencies, leading to the exclusion of peripheral communities. An attempt is made here to explore the process of exclusion inside an 'inclusive' development experience. The paper explores the case of remote community in Kerala by closely studying Paniyan tribe in Wyanad district of Kerala whose abysmal existence is a paradox to Kerala's development experience.

To analyse the dynamics of exclusion process, the paper looks at the nature of the tribal development in Wyanad, which is a residue of complex power

relations and interactions of tribal with outsider communities for more than four centuries. Thus, a historical analysis has been undertaken by looking at outsider communities as actors entering into the space of tribals propagating new modes of production, production relations and knowledge systems related to technology and livelihood practice.

Tribes and Human Development Indicators in Kerala

Kerala has the highest HDI (UNDP 2011) among all Indian States, which is even comparable to developed nations. Kerala has achieved almost cent per cent literacy rate, high life expectancy, better universal health coverage, better public food distribution systems, participatory planning and governance, without major economic growth but by 'expansion of basic education, healthcare and equitable land distribution' (Sen 1999), thus supposedly ensuring equity with development. But all these aspects attain sharp inequity when seen against the prevailing tribal situation in Kerala in general.

To understand the level of inequity among tribal in comparison to all other populations in Kerala, one indicator of human development, namely education is taken into consideration. Education is taken into focus for this analysis because Kerala has been credited with the status of a leading state in mass education programmes with its near cent per cent literacy rate. Following aspects would delineate the invisible inequities in such a claim, when the focus is on tribal communities:

- *Literacy Inequity:* When the overall literacy rate in Kerala is 94 per cent, the tribal communities in Kerala lag behind with 65 per cent (Census of India 2011). This gap of almost 30 per cent forms the highest inequality in literacy rate between any tribal and all other communities in any state of India.
- *Low Access:* Among all tribal communities in India, children of tribal communities in Kerala have the least access to school (DISE 2011-12).
- *Gender Inequity:* Kerala is among the three states in India with least percentage increase in tribal girl child enrollment in schools (DISE 2011-12).
- *Economic Impairment to Schooling:* Tribal communities in Kerala are among the six most impoverished tribal communities of all Indian states with a poverty rate of 44 per cent, which is close to the national average of 47 per cent (Planning Commission of India 2007).
- *Non-inclusive Pedagogy:* Kerala is among the three states in India to have least percentage increase of tribal teachers, which is an important for tribal education (DISE 2011-12).

Similar to education, one could find the presence of inequalities, in its access, availability and quality, in other areas essential for human development too. Regarding tribal communities in Kerala three crucial aspects are important: their heterogeneity, large socio-economic inequity in between tribes and small size of population. Tribals in Kerala are a heterogeneous group of thirty five notified communities, diverse with respect to livelihood (hunter gatherers, shifting cultivators and settled agriculturists), range of socialisation and

exposure (urbanised to particularly vulnerable tribal groups) and geographic allocation spreading around the hilly tracts of northern Kerala (majorly in the districts of Wyanad, Palakkad and Kasargod) and southern Kerala (districts of Idukki and Trivandrum). To take a note of the socio-economic disparity, it can be found that when tribal communities in Kerala like Malai Arayan have the high literacy rate of 94.50, communities like Maha Malsarare languishing with literacy rate of 20.83 per cent (Narayana 2010). Another crucial feature of the tribals in Kerala is their low population. Kerala has the lowest population of tribals in India constituting only 1.45 per cent (Census of India 2011) of its total population.

The Paniyans are the largest (almost one fifth of total tribal population) as well as the most deprived tribal communities in Kerala (CSDS 2007). Further, Wyanad district has the highest concentration (36%) of tribes in Kerala, especially Paniyan with almost three fourth of Paniyan population. Other major tribal communities in Wyanad include Adiyen, Kattunayakan Kuruman/Mullukuruman, Kurichiyen, Vetta (or Urali) Kuruman, Thachenadan Moopan, Wayanad Kadar, Mala Arayan, Karimpalan and Ulladan. As in the case of Kerala, in Wyanad also one could find the features of heterogeneity and large inequity among tribes, but unlike the general trend in Kerala, with 18.53 per cent they form a significant population here (Census of India, 2011). The factors of heterogeneity and inequity in between tribes of Waynad district can be observed from Table 8.1 (KILA, 2011):

Table 8.1
Descriptive Information on the Major Tribes of Wayanad District, Kerala

<i>Tribe</i>	<i>Percentage Break up of ST Population</i>	<i>Literacy Rate</i>	<i>Percentage Breakup of Drop Outs among STs</i>	<i>Livelihood</i>
MulluKurman/ Kuruman	13.70	86.94	7.02	Land Owning, Tertiary jobs
Kuruchian	16.49	84.76	15.72	Land Owning, Tertiary jobs
Adiyen	7.31	66.18	8.51	Landless Agricultural Labour
Paniyan	45.12	64.72	51.59	Landless Agricultural Labour
Kattunayakan	11.13	60.15	11.35	Landless, Food Gatherer

Of all tribal communities, the socio-economic deprivation of Paniyan who forms the largest tribal community in the district is more than apparent. Their deprivation is added by the widely reported cases of land alienation, sexual exploitation, exploitation in the field, cases of unwed mothers, death of agricultural labourers following their migration and exploitation at Coorg in Karnataka, farmer suicides, larger number of under-trial prisoners, etc.¹ Further, during this study it could be identified that in Wyanad there was stratification among tribes, which in some cases reached the extremes level of practising untouchability. Paniyan and Adiyen occupy the lower position in such stratification whereas Kurichiyen and Kurmar occupy a higher position. This is later

reflected in terms of their educational status, employment, claiming of ST reservation benefits. Thus, one could see that for the marginalisation of the Paniyans, outsider communities as well by other tribal communities are no less responsible. The whole question needs to be seen with respect to the impact of outsider communities on the Paniyans.

For a thorough social investigation, one will have to look at the particular social milieu which exists in the multiplicity of interaction of different actors in its space; the formation and sustenance of inequities in these interactions over time; formation and responses in the public domains of action. Such an approach raises a fundamental question as the indicators conceal the inequality and reality and focus only on aggregates, which become a knowledge source for the purpose of governance to monitor, control and confirm through subjectivity (Merry 2011). What is fundamental is to look at the process of systematic marginalisation of subalterns (here, Paniyans) in Kerala (Kunhman 2002 as quoted by Tharakan 2006)

Phases of Alienation and Dispossession

'Paniyan' in Malayalam means 'labourer': clearly the etymology of their name is rooted in their occupation. Here two aspects have to be noted. Firstly, for their occupation as agricultural labourers, they are highly dependent on other communities. Secondly, the word Paniyan is used in a derogatory sense by other communities. One could find such a trend in the naming of different occupation based castes in other parts of India such as *Chamar/Mochi* (tanners and cobblers), *Bhangi/Balmiki* (Scavengers) and the usage is essentially a reference of caste identity and oppression. The impact of such a language among tribes can be profound as James Frazer notes in the 'Golden Bough' (1890),

... the North American Indian regards his name, not as a mere label, but as a distinct part of his personality, just as much as are his eyes or his teeth, and believes that injury will result as surely from the malicious handling of his name as from a wound inflicted on any part of his physical organism.

In the onomastic of 'Paniyan' itself, one could find the presence of two cardinal positions and two actors. The first is the conscious or unconscious understanding of the relevance of name in Paniyan's identity and the usage of this identity marker for oppression. As the Paniyan started interacting with different outsider communities, they became familiar with a language of oppression and internalised it. The emerging of phases of historical progression are important in this context when the language of oppression (which is identified here as the new mode of knowledge production or livelihood practice) developed by an outsider community is deconstructed. Such a historical approach also aligns with particular case of tribes in India because of their transitory nature and as their process of transformation is a historical process (Beteille 1970).

Kulirani (1996) has described different historical phases of Paniyan based on history of Wayanad and corresponding livelihood strategies taken by Paniyans, which are as follows: (1) an early phase of food gathering, (2) a period of bonded labour where major part of the payment only in kind supplemented

with food gathering, (3) introduction of daily wage earner-payments in cash, and 4) dependence on welfare measures of the state after being sidelined in the competitive labour market and with a sense desperation setting in. Unlike such a demarcation, in this study different historical phases are demarcated on the basis of arrival of an outsider community or emergence of a new political authority because the earlier demarcation makes the outsider communities conspicuously absent and tends to look at Paniyan as subjects who are adapting to a situation that is quite unknown to them. Further, such a repositioning of history here is essential for a change in the local popular culture which demeans Paniyans and subsequent change in the state policy towards them. Thus six historical phases through which Paniyan went through are identified in this paper: (1) The early phase of hunting and food gathering; (2) Arrival of Goundar and Chetty communities; (3) Invasion by the Kottayam dynastic rulers; (4) Invasion by the colonial British; (5) Arrival of marginal farmers from outside; and (6) Formation of the Indian states and civil societies. A brief account of all these phases is given below:

Early Phase of Hunter – Gatherers

The myth of Paniyan genesis is prevalent in their oral tradition. According to these genesis narratives collected during the field work and recorded in different studies on Paniyan, the first parents of Paniyan are believed to be Ippimala Uttappan and Ippimala Uttama, a brother and sister who came out of an egg. Nair (1976) adds that Ippimala refers to a mountain and Paniyans identify them as Ippimalamakkal, the children of Ippimountain. Another narrative mentions Paniyans as those who have been freely roaming around in jungles as hunter and food gatherers.

As Kulirani (1996) highlights, three aspects have to be noted in this phase. First is the heterogeneity of tribes in Wyanad in terms of their livelihood and their language (possibly hinting at their non-indigenous origin). At this phase there was the presence of other food-gathering groups like Kattunayakan, Adiyar, shifting cultivators like Urali Kuruman who spoke dialects of Kannada; and the presence of Malayalam-speaking tribes like the hunting tribe Kurichiyar and the agricultural tribe Mullu Kuruman from the southern plains. Secondly, the autonomous existence of tribes with the presence of Kurumbi/Kurumba-Veda rulers (of Mullukuruman and Vetta Kuruman tribes) at this period is important. Finally, comes the out-migration of Paniyans to other districts of Kerala like Kozhikode, Kannur and Malappuram. As Vinod CP (2000) notes, this phase can be summarised as follows:

... it is widely believed that the whole region was an abode of 'jungle tribes' like Paniyan and Adiyar till the 5th century A.D. and since then the movements of people from the plains started to penetrate into Wayanad region.

Arrival of Jain and Chetty Communities

From 8th century onwards, immigration of Jain population from Karnataka has been assumed to have strengthened as evidenced by a number of Jain temples in different parts of Wyanad. This community introduced settled agricultural practice in Wyanad where land was plentifully available and the existing tribes like

Kurichiyan and Mullu Kuruman practised only *punamkrishi*, i.e. shifting cultivation. Introduction of settled agriculture forced these tribes to change from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture (Johni 2010). Similarly, Hindu agricultural communities – Wyanadan Chetty (Malyalam speaking), Idanadan Chetty (Tamil speaking) and Mandatan Chetty (Kanada speaking), who practised settled wet land cultivation are presumed to have come at different points of time from the plains of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka (Vinod 2009).

The most important contribution of both these immigrant communities was in the form of introduction of settled agriculture in Wayanad. When Kurichiyan and Mullu Kuruman changed to settled agriculture Paniyans and Adiyans became bonded labourers and agrestic slaves (Johni 2010: 66). The Paniyan genesis myth narratives indicate that because of their physique they were considered suitable for hard agricultural labour. It is said that Mullu Kuruman captured Paniyans from the forest for serving a group of Jain cultivators at Goundar. The myth also refers that the captured Paniyans were a brother and a sister who were asked to treat themselves as husband and wife. Thus Paniyans were 'domesticated' for agricultural labour and they became bonded labours. Chetty communities' also organised the Paniya labour through *Chemmi/Moopan* who were religious heads or local leaders of the Paniyan Community (Vinod 2009).

Two aspects have to be noted in this phase. Firstly, Paniyans entered into the first phase of exploitation by becoming bonded agricultural labourers. But, they still had free access to natural resources. At this phase, their name Ippimakkal has been supposedly changed into Paniyan, meaning labour. Similarly Ravulvar came to be known as Adiyar (Slave) tribe (Kulirani 1996). Secondly, land in Wyanad started gaining importance among different outsider communities as a property worth owing because of its unique geographical location, wet climate and high soil fertility. As a result, more and more outsider communities were attracted to come to Wyanad.

Invasion by Kottayam Dynasty

The land relations of different tribes acquired a crucial change with the arrival of Kottayam/Cotiote dynasty by the late 13th century. A narrative (Johni 2010) mentions that once the Kumbla ruler (from Kumbazha in present Kasaragod district of Kerala) who came to Thirunelli temple in Wyanad (famous from that period for its Hindu religious sanctity) saw the Wyanad's unique land. Later he brought his army to conquer the land but was defeated and captured by the Vedar ruler and imprisoned at Velikumbam fort (present Veliyambam near Pulpally in Wyanad). Upon knowing about this Kottayam and Kurumbranad rulers (from the present Kannur and Kozhikode districts) came to his rescue. But after seeing the mighty Vedar army, they reached an agreement of marriage between Kumbla ruler and Vedar princess. But during the wedding, the Kottayam-Kurumbranad ruler attacked the Vedar and later took control of Wayand. Though another narrative of colonial British account (Nair 1911) has a different version of it, the common point of the story is the invasion of Wyanad by Kottayam and Kurumbranad rulers and later taking over the whole Wyanad by the Kottayam dynastic rulers.

Under Kottayam dynasty one could see the strengthening of feudal system in Wyanad. The country was divided into ten *Nads* (divisions) and *Nair* Chieftains were assigned the post of administrators called as *Janmi* (feudal landlords). All the agricultural communities like Chetty, Goundar, Kurichiyan, Mullu Kuruman became tenants under the Nair Janmi, whereas Paniyan and Adiyar got into a structured bonded labour system called *Kundalpani* or *Vallipani* (Nair 1911; Kulirani 1996).

Paniyan families were attached to *Edoms* (houses or places) or *Devaswams* (property of temple deity) under Nair landlords. Devan (2006) gives a detailed account of the Kundalpani. Under the system, Paniyans were recruited as bonded labour during the 'slave market' associated with the annual festival at Valiyurkav Bhagavathy temple by advancing an amount called *Nippupanmor Valiyurkavpanm*. After that the Paniyan recruit was to stand in front of *Sreekovil*, the most sacred place of the temple and pledge to serve the employer until the next temple, festival by reciting a song called *Kakkapattu*.

The slaves were divided into three ownership categories: *Janmam*, *Kanam* and *Pattam*. In the case of *Janmam* slaves, ownership was unconditional and absolute and they had the highest price of 250 to 300 *panms* (1 Rupee = 3.5 *panm*). *Kanam* slaves were mortgaged to the master (for two-thirds of the slave's value and annual payment of paddy) and *Pattam* slaves were *Janmams* slaves rented out for a certain period (man for 8 *panms* and woman for 4 *panms*). The slaves were paid *Valli* (daily payment; thus the name *Vallipani*) of 2.5 *sers* (1 *ser* = 1 litre) of paddy for man and 2 *ser* for woman.

Three features marked this phase. Initially, the emergence of feudal system had marginalised the non-cultivating tribes without any knowledge of land titles into slaves. Second and the most important feature was the beginning of the process of Sankritisation among tribes in Wyanad. Chattopadhyaya (2004) finds the Sankritisation of forest space as a part of Brahmanical perception of state in early Indian history. In the case of Wyanad one could see the rise of a bonded labour system structured in a Brahmanical social order. For example, though the Valiyurkav temple was constructed by the Kottayam dynasty and managed by Nairs, the deity of Valiyurkav has a permanent place in the psyche of tribes. The festival associated with the deity is still faithfully observed by the tribes in Wyanad (Johni 2010). Thus, the bond between master and slave made here has become a sacred agreement. Devan (2006) records one of the *Kakkapattu*,

Vallookav Bhagavathikku
Janmamayitullapadathilu
Moovayiram Vithuvithakkannudu
Udaneparayannu Chinnuanneram
Enneonnumcheyyaruthuvalluracha
Ivideadimayayinikkumjanu
Vallooruadimayayininnu Chinnu

[Chinnu, a Paniyan, is taken as a captive and is produced before the deity by the non-tribal employer, then, he says that he has to sow in the paddy field of Valliyoorkav deity. He pleads to the revered deity to leave him unhurt and in turn he promises to work for his master (Santhosh 2008)]

One could also see that with the growing importance of land, the cultivating tribes positioned themselves as elites over non-cultivating tribes, which signalled the formation of tribal hierarchy in Wyanad. Practice of purity and pollution was also evolved during this phase. As Ayyapan notes,

Feudal land relations based on slavery of the 'untouchables' developed in the subsequent periods. Many characteristics of the Hindu caste system penetrated into the local social life and value system. Internal stratification on the basis of purity and pollution, a universal feature of the pan Indian caste system, made its marks even among the tribal people in the area.

During the fieldwork, it could be observed that cultivating tribes like Kuruman and Kurichiyan still identify themselves as tribal elites and consider Paniyans as 'dark-skinned' who stay in unhygienic dwellings, have pleasure seeking behaviour and are lazy. This is a classic example of Sankritisation (Srinivas 1956) of tribes in Wyanad.

The third aspect to be noted in this phase is the introduction of *Valli*, daily payments in paddy as part of *Kundalpanni* system. Such a process increased the dependence of non-cultivating communities on landlords who saved them from the risks of being engaged in cultivation for food and kept them away from the idea of surplus for future, a feature of hunter gatherers.

Invasion of Colonial British

The invasions of Mysore dynasty from Karnataka to Kerala through Wyanad by the end of 17th century are significant as it led to conflicts with the British East India Company and their subsequent arrival in Wyanad. Against the backdrop of the domination of Malabar, including the present districts of northern Kerala with its sea ports that were of importance to Mysore, but were equally crucial to the British, the possession of Wyanad became strategically important for both the powers. The Kottayam dynasty under Pazhassi Raja defended the Mysore's invasion with the aid of British. Following the treaty of Coorg in 1786, Wyanad came again under the Kottayam dynasty, but it led to conflicts with the British.

Pazhassi Raja along with Nair chiefs organised Kurichiyan and Mullukurman tribes into guerrilla model armed collectivities to defend against the British. Thus, this phase led to the initiation of the tribal communities into politically organised groups to defend their land. Their struggle was curbed by the assassination of Pazhassi Raja in 1805 leading to the total British entry to Wyanad. But in 1812 Kurichiyan and Mullukuruman organised a revolt against the British using traditional weaponry of bow and arrow. Though the motive behind such an armed conflict could be their dissent with the British policies of imposition of high tax and banning of shifting cultivation, it could be presumed that this was the first tribal resistance against a colonial power in South India (Johni 2010).

Three major features of the British rule have also to be noted. At the first instance, the British retained *Janmi-kudiyan* system in Wyanad, which was already prevalent in Malabar (*Jaysree*). In fact, Malabar had the largest population of slaves in India covering about 15 per cent of its population (Slavery in *Encyclopedia Britannica*) Further administrative reforms brought by

the British like massive land surveys led to appropriation of land under them. The land was divided into: tilled land, private forest, revenue forest and reserve forest. Obviously, the government had high stakes on all categories of land and it was too preoccupied with it. In this task, it was asserted by the members of the Nair community and by doing so they rose to prominence in the government structure. The agricultural communities could act their property rights but only at the cost of high tax payments. Other communities like Brahmins, Moplah (Muslim tradesman), Goundar maintained their landlord – tradesman role in the social structure. The revenue system based on the capitalist concept of property rights was alien to Paniyans and they remained as bonded labourers or slaves. Further marginalisation of Paniyan happened as the access to their forest-based livelihood has been curtailed by different colonial administrative reforms like declaration of Wayanad Reserve (leading to excessive tree felling and teak plantation) and Indian Forest Act of 1927.

Secondly, the strengthening of tribal hierarchy and practice of sankritisation went on unabated as can be observed from the note prepared by Goplan Nair (1911), a civil officer under the British. He classified tribes like Kurichiyar, Karimpalan, Mullu Kuruman, Vetta Kuruman, Thachandan Moopan as hill tribes and Paniyan, Adiyar as 'predial' slaves. Kurichiyar tribe enjoyed the highest status among them and purified their worship places by holy water from a Brahmin, Karimpalan tribe wore *kuduma*, hair tufts like Brahmins, Kadar tribe referred to their house as *Ilams*, like Namboodri Brahmins in Malabar and Kattunayakan were responsible for 'lowering their status' by eating monkey's flesh.

Thirdly, considering the high-altitude climate, the British introduced plantation economy based on coffee (1820), black pepper (1875), tea (1892), rubber (1904) and cardamom in Wayand, which ultimately found their place in international exports (Nair 1911). Following the demand for labour force and reports of different Christian missionary commissions (See Jaysree) the slavery system in British Colonies was legally abolished by the British in 1843, though it continued *de facto* due to the influence of slave owners and the ritual compulsions. A colonial, upper caste perception of Paniyan at this phase can be observed from Nair's account (1911):

The Paniyars are a necessity to Wynad cultivation; they alone are able to control the wild cattle of this country and in the soft and clayey soil, which sinks to the touch, they alone can handle the plough. Their habits are migratory and unless the employer is kind, they suddenly give him the slip and are not easily caught. In moral turpitude they stand high. They are professional burglars, waylay and rob travellers and do not hesitate to commit the gravest crimes and yet they are excellent-field labourers. They are fond of music, sing during work in the fields, spend whole nights singing and dancing to the accompaniment of a peculiarly shaped drum and a reed-flute.

Arrival of Marginal Farmers

By 1940, farmers from the erstwhile Cochin and Travancore princely states in southern Kerala started migrating to Wayanad. It was of such high influx that the population growth rate of Wayanad between 1951 and 1971 was as high as 55

per cent, when it was only 25 per cent in all Kerala as a whole. Largely of Christian and marginal farming backgrounds, these communities were affected by food scarcity during the World War II and 'grow more food' campaign. Further, they had 'exposure to European planters and plantation systems and could internalise the logic of agricultural practices that was required for a commercially viable agricultural production' (Vinod 2009). These immigrants acquired large tracts of land from Nair landlords on lease and in some cases they even illegally acquired forests and wastelands. The settlers obtained tribal land through counterfeit land titles by bribing the government officials, giving alcohol to tribals for land at cheap rates, by taking their land on lease and illegally obtaining ownership rights (Aufschnaiter 2007)

The immigration of marginal farmers further increased the demand of labour, which resulted in larger integration and monetisation of indigenous labour economy with domestic market leading to the gradual end of tribal slavery system, Kundalpanni and the beginning of Kulipanni, a cash-based wage system. It furthered marginalisation of tribes caused by large-scale alienation from their lands and increase in the number of landless tribal agricultural labourers. The proportion of tribal agricultural labourers in Wyanad increased from 43 per cent in 1961 to 72 per cent in 1976 (Bijoy and Raman 2003). Once again, it is to be noted that as land in Wyanad attracted more and more agricultural communities from different geographical regions to Wyanad, the tribal land alienation in Wyanad increased and non-agricultural tribes like Paniyans became increasingly dependent on the outsider communities.

Regime of State and Civil Society: Policy, Legislation and Rights

With the formation of Indian Union in 1947 and the federal state of Kerala in 1956, a large number of affirmative policies were taken for tribal development. While analysing these, we would be looking at how these affected the land relations that were against the interest of tribes.

In the post-independence period, land reforms in Kerala were initiated by the communist-led government with the passing of Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill in 1957. It included ceiling on holdings, permanent occupancy rights to tenants, etc. Such radical reforms aroused protests from the landed gentry leading to 'liberation struggle' against the government and its absolution, and imposition of the President's Rule in 1959. The following Congress-led government passed a watered down version of the previous bill, Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963. But such legislation was ineffective because of the instability of government and Kerala coming under President's Rule again (Radhakrishnan 1981).

Tribal issues in Wayanad came for serious consideration of the state machinery following the tribal and marginal farmer uprising, initiated by the Naxalites against local landlords in 1960s. But the movement soon got diluted, for which two reasons may be advanced. One, the marginal farmers who played crucial role in the movement, were conferred ownership rights on the lands leased in by them under the Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act of 1969 by the Communist Government. Further, the movement was curbed by the strong police action infamous for the fake encounter death of the movement's

prominent leader, 'Naxal Varghese' in 1970. But such movements later prompted the government to pass legislation in favour the tribal land issue.

The Kerala Private Forest (Vesting and Assignment) Act entitling around 23,000 hectares of land to landless tribals was passed in 1972, and in 1975, following 1950 Debhar Commission guidelines, the interests of Kerala Scheduled Tribes were safeguarded (restriction on transfer of lands and restoration of alienated land) through the legislation of the Tribal Land Act with effect from the 26th January 1960 (Bijoy and Raman 2003). The Act received mandatory assent from the President of Indian and was included under the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution so that it would not be challenged in any court of law. Following the weakening of land struggles and the rise to prominence of the lobby of landed class and encroachers in Wyanad, one could see the government legislation during post-1975 contravening its previous legislation.

The Kerala Forest Produce Act 1978 restricted access of tribals to forest produces, the Forest Conservation Act 1980 led to large tribal evictions and though after 11 years, the rules of Tribal Land Act 1975 were formulated in 1986 diluting the previous act. The time period for restoring alienated land was changed from 26 January 1960 to 1st January 1986. Tribal beneficiaries were asked to return the sum they collected during the land transaction to non-tribals along with a charge on the improvements made on the land and the compensation was decided by the revenue divisional officers. Though government provided a loan for compensation with 20 years of time period, none took the loan. Even claims to land were not properly filed as they lacked proof of ownership due to hefty compensation (Bhuria et al., 2004)

Following the non-implementation of the act, in 1988, a writ petition was filed at Kerala High Court by a non-tribal, Dr Nalla Thampi Thera. In 1993, the High Court issued a writ of mandamus for implementation of the same within 6 months with a series of remarks against the callousness of government in its non-implementation of legislation for oppressed classes in support of the settlers' lobby. At the same time, the state government appealed for extending the deadline, mentioning that tribal were not taking loans and even brought an ordinance for amending the 1975 act. Following the governor's rejection of the ordinances brought by both Congress- and Left led-governments, the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Amendment Act, 1996 was passed, which was rejected by the President of India as it fell under the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution. Thus, a second amendment bill, the Kerala Restriction on Transfer by and Restoration of Lands of Scheduled Tribes Bill was passed in 1999, replacing the term 'tribal land' with 'agricultural land'. The Kerala High Court rejected the validity of both 1996 and 1999 amendment bills in 2000. But the Kerala government could file a writ petition and obtain stay order from the Supreme Court against the High Court verdicts in 2001.

Muthanga Adivasi Land Struggle: Before and After

As the state government legislation reduced the claim of tribes on their land, ironically the same political organisations that were in power mobilised the

tribals for land struggle. Organisations ranging from CPI(M) forming Adivasi Kshema Samithi and Adavasi Dalit Samra Samathi, rightist factions forming Wayanad Adivasi Sangam were significant in forming an Adivasi identity based on land against the settler encroachments (see Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2004). The formation of this identity led to a series of sporadic events that culminated in what came to be known as 'Muthanga Adivasi Land Struggle'.

In 1993, 220 landless tribal families under Adivasi Vikasana Pravathaka Samathy constructed houses in 67.5 acres of 128 acres of vested forest in Ambukuthy in Wyanad. The following combined action of police and forest officials led to the arrest of 317 tribals, and a case was filed on 1993. In 1995, 229 families under Adivasi Aikya Samathy and South Zone Adivasi Forum forcefully settled in 100 acres of Chengeri Tribal Rehabilitation Project, which was followed by the detention of 120 activists and arrest of 244 people. In the same year, 106 tribal occupants were arrested at Panvally. In 2001, 32 starvation deaths of tribals were reported from Wyanad, Palakkad and Kannur districts of Kerala. In the same year, a group of tribal supported by radical left groups looted food items from vehicles of government civil supplies department in Wyanad and the same were distributed among the tribals.

The critical phase started when Adivasi Dalit Samara Samiti started a camped protest in front of Kerala chief minister's residence on 30 August 2001 and in 48 days the protest led to an agreement with the state government. The major points of the agreement included the constitution of Tribal Resettlement and Development Mission to provide five acres of land to tribals having less than one acre before 31 December 2002, inclusion of tribal lands in the Fifth Schedule.

Two significant crucial aspects have to be noted at this phase of the struggle. One, the formation of Adivasi Maha Gothra Sabha, (AGMS), a grand assembly of 31 tribal communities. Two, when the previously agricultural tribal communities like Kuruman and Kurichiyar took part in the struggle for their land alienated by settlers according to 1975 Act, for the first time in the history non-cultivator landless communities like Paniyan and Kattunayakan also asserted for vested forest lands which were to be distributed to them under 1972 Act (See Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2004).

Following the failure of the government agreement of 2001, AGMS convened a tribal court and decided to continue the protest. In January 2003, around 4,000 tribals forcefully entered and settled in deforested portions of Eucalyptus plantation area of Muthanga in Wyanad. Following a forest fire, which was claimed to be set by tribals, a heavy police assault was made on the occupants leading to the death of two, burning of several huts and arrest of more than 300 tribals. Though the movement failed, this phase influenced the crystallisation of tribal identity as D.J. Kjosavik and N. Shanmugaratnam quote a tribal:

The 44 days in samara bhoomi were like a dream. My husband did not drink alcohol. We had no fights at home. My children were happy and read their school books. We hoped that the government would let us stay there.' The hopes and dreams of the adivasis are reflected in these statements. Evidently, adivasi lives were changing through the experience at Muthanga. Each one

reminds the other, this is our self-rule area. So we must set an example with our exemplary behaviour (2004).

Muthanga incident points to the political mobilisation and how the memories of it were suppressed by the state. It is to be noted that the cycle of events that predated Muthanga continued uninterrupted, which include passing of the Forest Right Acts (2006), Supreme Court verdict (in 2009) on 1999 act in favour of tribals, tribals occupying forest land in Pulpally in 2012, death of 58 tribal infants due to malnutrition in 2013, etc.

Means of Production and Patterns of Knowledge Production

In the first section, we have closely looked at the paradoxes inside Kerala's development experience and in the second section we have tried to explore the historicity of the process of exclusion involved in it. Now, through a pattern analysis of the historical phases of alienation and dispossession, we have discussed so far, a fresh attempt has been made to look at the tribal identity, especially that of Paniyans evolving in relation to patterns of knowledge production in that period. It is fundamental to look at this identity transformation in the wider context of Kerala's development experience, which has supposedly empowered the marginalised communities through public action for basic access and rights, resulting in high social sector spending. Jean Dréze and Amartya Sen point out that the success of Kerala in spite of such a low level of income is the result of the public action aimed at promoting people's basic entitlements and capabilities (as quoted in Tharkan 2006). Each outsider community came into the space of tribal with superior livelihood/knowledge practice. Later, the tribal identity evolved in response to this practice but in a submissive form.

Table 8.2

Genesis of Tribal Identity and the Role of Outsider Communities/Agents

<i>Outsider Community/Agent</i>	<i>Knowledge Production</i>	<i>Distorted Tribal Identity</i>
Jain-Chetty	Agriculture practice	Bonded Labours
Kottayam Dynasty	Caste-based landlordism; Sanskritisation of the tribes	Organised into slaves, Formation of tribal elites, Paniyan 'untouchables'
British Colonial Rule	Land revenue system, Plantation Economy	Deprived of access to forest
Immigrant Farmers	Cash crop-based small agriculture, linkage with labour market	Land alienated, increasing role as agricultural labour
State	Legislations and development Policies, HDI-Decentralisation based approach	Land alienation, Starvation deaths, Dependency on welfare measures
Political Parties and NGOs	Land rights, Political mobilisation and organisation	Developing Adivasi Identity based on land, Stigmatised by memories of struggles

Here, one may observe that the tribal identity has always remained as a subject of transformation and exploitation in their relationship with nature and

social systems. This is in sharp contrast to the experience of social mobilisation in Kerala. As Patrick Heller (1996) notes:

Since the last decade of the nineteenth century, Kerala has been the site of a nearly continuous succession of social movements: a social-religious reform movement in the early part of the century; nationalist, agrarian and prodemocracy movements on the 1930s and 1940s; a series of rural and industrial labour movements (from 1930 to 1975); and most recently various new social movements including state wide campaign for decentralisation orchestrated by state reformers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These high levels of social mobilisation have been directly tied to what is widely known in development circles as the 'Kerala Model', namely levels of social development unparalleled in low-income societies.

But such a model conceptualised tribes as a 'frozen working class', who were property-less and denied of mobility for generations, unlike workers in a modern capitalist social structure. So it followed the broad development programmes planned by the national government. Further, the class reductionism approach sidelined the customary land tenure systems of Adivasis causing failure of allocating space for forest commons in exemplary land reforms established in Kerala (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2004)

When the government followed the frozen working class approach, at the micro level one could identify a different dynamics. The ideological platform developed by the present agrarian social structure to tap the labour supply by the Paniyans is crucial here. In Paniyan myth of their genesis, mentions about the story of the Paniyan who freely roamed around the forest before being captured and tamed by Ippimalachetti and Kaunda – Upper caste landlords for agricultural labour after seeing their strong physique. During the fieldwork, similar narratives of branding Paniyans as intellectually weak but physically strong could be collected. Other narratives also stated that when settled farmers moved to Kodagu in Karnataka for ginger cultivation, they could not find any labourer among the local population as good as Paniyan. So they took Paniyans along with them for working in the fields. In 2008 it was reported that this migration led to death of more than 200 tribals in two years due to their maltreatment in fields (Tehelka 2009). During interviews even school teachers were very particular about mentioning Paniyan students being weak in Mathematics but good in sports. In some cases, Paniyan students were asked to sit separately at the back seats of classrooms.

Another aspect is the cultural hegemony set out by Malayalam over Paniyan language, which is a scriptless language formed out of mixture of Malayalam and Kannada. John Zerzan (1998) in his essay on 'primitive communism' quoted Levi-Strauss: 'the primary function of written communication was to facilitate exploitation and subjugation'. Such a domination of Malayalam over Paniyan language was observed in different narratives obtained such as ostracising Paniyan students from schools, lack of educational materials to support Paniyan children in primary schools, etc.

Another feature attributed to Paniyans is their laziness and recalcitrance to industriousness. The Planning Commission Report on Western Ghats

Development Programme (1982) identifies the failure of Sugandhagiri cardamom project for tribal rehabilitation with 40 per cent absenteeism of tribal workers. Different studies on high rate of dropouts among tribal children identify the lack of motivation among parents and students as single largest cause for school dropouts. Here, it would be important to note Tanaka's (1980) observation that hunter gatherer communities spend 'strikingly less time labouring and much time at rest and leisure'. The Paniyans have been exploited by outsider communities as they were frequently involved in exchanging liquor for land transactions and labour leading to unjust payments and increasing the frequency of addicts.

Few dimensions of complex Paniyan identity have emerged in the course of the above discussion. The imagery of Paniyan being physically strong, gullible and unclean is rooted in the popular culture of Wyanad, supporting hegemony over Paniyan culture and passing the way for further exploitation.

Further, the Paniyan's livelihood development has also been curbed due to their entrapment in the agrarian economy of Wyanad. In an economy with 57 per cent (Wayanad Initiative 2006) of land under-cultivation, the Paniyan community became the labour reserve for labour intensive paddy cultivation, followed by plantation and cash-crop cultivations. This was furthered by different control mechanisms manipulated from outside like slavery, bonded labour system, etc. Further, this labour reserve formed an informal economy that could absorb the fluctuations during agrarian distresses in Wyanadas in 2004 (George and Krishnaprasad 2006).

Relooking at the Development Paradigm

Clearly the HDI-based approach to tribal development is problematic because it masquerades social realities by looking only at certain indicators and eulogising positive experiences. Such an approach is situated in an ideological framework that looks at creating a universe against multiversals by following a linear approach. It is in sharp contrast to the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen, from where it ironically has taken its philosophical framework: when capabilities mean improving capabilities and developing agencies so that they may lead a life they have reason to value. The values, he considers as product of larger 'public discussions and democratic understanding and acceptance' by the community (Sen 2000). By focusing only on the 'evaluative aspect' of the approach, pinpointing only income, literacy and life expectancy and disregarding of 'the agency aspect', one is led to a situation where the approach gets 'trapped in its own measure' (Fukuda-Parr 2003).

With regard to literacy, Felix Padel (2011) rightly quotes a Native American leader, Russell Means, in 'Sacrificing People':

I detest writing. The process itself epitomizes the European concept of 'legitimate' thinking. What is written is given an importance that is denied the spoken. My culture, the Lakota, has an oral tradition, so ordinarily I reject writing. It is one of the white world's ways of destroying the cultures of non-European peoples, the imposing of an abstraction over the spoken relationship of a people.

By citing the particular case of Orissa, he observes that most of non-tribal people there apart from Brahmins rarely used writing, which epitomises knowledge as something obtainable only from books, not through experience of living with nature, in the midst of other people. Further such an approach camouflaged two aspects of tribals in Kerala: abysmal status of tribals in Kerala left out in policy circle and one of the longest ever historical exploitation of tribals in India as is exemplified by Wyanad. The indicator-based approach not only focused upon central tendencies, it also failed to see the subtle sociological realities that inhibit the development. Thus the values that are so dear to the Paniyans and their worldviews are not included in policy framework, denying them a life they have reason to value. Moreover, the approach has become an apparatus to continue the exploitation mechanism at micro level aided by legislations, which can ensure its continuance.

What can probably replace the indicator-based approach? As we look back on positions developed in the paper, it should begin by looking at the formation of tribal identity, else any such attempt would end up merely as another exercise in gaining knowledge and about production of exploitation. The following argument of C.R. Bijoy is worth considering:

Unlike others, adivasis have a special relationship and dependence on land which gives them the notion of territoriality. Their existence as communities is possible only if their inalienable right to their territories is acknowledged.

The fact that 96 per cent of tribal households in Kerala have less than one hectare of land indicates that they form one of the largest landless (NSSO 2006) and the largest small and landless agricultural labourers in India. How effective would be a development indicator if it fails to show this aspect? Further, the same logic can be applied to the denial of access of tribals to forest and water resources, outright rejection of ethnic organisations and self-governance. One can argue about the rights and legislative framework developed by the state to ensure them. But the case study of Paniyans in Kerala highlights that just legislative framework or welfare state policies cannot solve all the issues around development. Probably development indicators need to be indigenously developed and linked to the consolidation of tribal identity.

HDI-based development approach in fact contradicts the tribal development. Such an approach misses the cultural and historicity factor and increases its vulnerability in the context of its full range application. As Amartya Sen (2000) notes:

The right approach would have to be sensitive to the circumstance involved – both the nature of public services to be offered and the characteristics of the society to which they are to be offered. The latter must include the behavioral values of different kinds, which influence individual choices and incentives.

The present study may be defended on the premise that it is important to analyse the inclusive nature of HDI-based development approach, when applied to small but compact tribal communities, which may qualify to be called as indigenous communities.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, Kerala, Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata, and Indian Institute of Public Administration, Delhi, for their assistance during the study and paper preparation. I would like to thank Professor Felix Padel, Dr D Narayana of CDS Trivandrum, Dr Bidan Kanti Das of IDSK, Varun Sharma and Namami Sharma of Delhi School of Social Work for their valuable comments, kind guidance and support.

Note

1. These issues have been brought together in 'Paniya Sadas', an International seminar organised by Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum held on 13-15 March 2010 at Shreyas, Sulthan Bathery, Wayanad, Kerala.

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