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Cosmetic changes for Adivasis

In Kerala's forests, the Kadar Adivasi community soon to be displaced for a hydro electric project, say the Union Budget 2025 will not help them survive displacement due to 'development'

middle class, particularly salaried individuals," says Geetha Vazhachal.

A member of the Kadar community – classified as a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG), 36-year-old Geetha resides in the catchment area of the proposed Athirappilly Hydro Electric Power Project in Thrissur district of Kerala.

The dam is located in the Chalakudy river basin and will displace her community for the fourth time. "We are experiencing significant displacement due to large-scale infrastructure projects across the country. Furthermore, there is no mention of the ongoing corporate takeover of our lands, forests and resources," points out Geetha who has become the face of the mass movement against the dam.

"For tribal communities living in the forests, climate change creates unprecedented survival challenges. We are confronted with a hostile environment, degraded forests, and limited livelihood options," says Geetha, Kerala's only woman tribal chieftain.



Left: Geetha with her students. Right: Geetha resides in the catchment area of the proposed Athirappilly Hydro Electric Power Project in Thrissur district of Kerala.

Like others in the Kadar community, Geetha's ancestors were forest dwellers forced to leave the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve in 1905 when the British constructed a tramway connecting the region to evacuate timber to the Kochi harbour, and onward for shipment to Great Britain.

Geetha's family moved to Peringalkuthu and then Sholayar forest from where they will now be displaced again.

She points out that although the budget shows an increase in funding for tribal welfare, "allocations mainly prioritise model residential school infrastructure development, and connectivity, which will likely only have cosmetic effects. Improvements in roads and infrastructure will be meaningless for vulnerable tribal communities whose agricultural lands, forests, water resources, and livelihoods have been taken away."

Many people in Kerala anticipated that the budget would allocate a fair portion of support for the landslide victims of Mundakai and Chooral in the Wayanad district. "It seems that the entire southern region of India has been overlooked."

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