

## DISPLACEMENT AND REHABILITATION OF TRIBES IN KERALA: A STUDY ON POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT

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### Introduction

Kerala is one of the leading states in terms of social development parameters in the country which is located in the South-western part of India. According to 2011 Census, the total population of Kerala is 33406061 with 16027412 males and 17378649 females. The state consists of 14 districts, 63 taluks, 520 towns and 1018 villages as per 2011 census. The most populated district in Kerala is Malappuram (Population: 4112920) and the least populated district is Wayanad (Population: 817420). Among the States of India; Kerala stands at 12<sup>th</sup> position in terms of population. According to 2011 Population Census, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes constitute 25.24 percent of the total population of India. Scheduled Castes constitutes 16.63 percent and Scheduled Tribes 8.61 percent of the population.

Tribals in Kerala are commonly called as "Adivasis". There are 36 tribal communities across the state and "Paniya" is the biggest tribe among them. The Schedule tribes in Kerala, mostly inhabiting in the mountains of the Western Ghats, constitute 1.45 percentage of the total population, while the Schedule caste people constitute about 9.1 percent in 2011 census. The sex ratio of Scheduled Tribe population in Kerala is 1035. The highest concentration of Scheduled Tribes is seen in Wayanad district (31.24 percent) followed by Idukki (11.51 percent), Palakkad (10.10 percent) and Kasaragod (10.08 percent). The coastal district of Alappuzha has the lowest percentage (1.36 percentage).

Defining the tribe is more elusive, because everyone has different perspectives on the tribal communities. Anthropologist, Social Scientists, and others have similarities as well as dissimilarities in

their views about the characteristics of tribes. Oxford dictionary defines the tribe as a social division in a traditional society who has shared characteristics and a recognized leader. The Cambridge dictionary also recognizes the commonality in tribal language, culture and history, at the same time it identifies tribes as who does not live in towns or cities. Many of the anthropologists has used the term Tribe as a classificatory device and have observed the common and unique features of the tribal communities which differentiate them from non-tribals as a homogenous social group with a socio-cultural, ethnic and territorial integration and geographical isolation.

During the 70s, 80s and 90s a series of forest acts were enacted and amended related to the land acquisition and restoration. Among these policies few protected forest, few protected tribals, and few restricted the rights of tribal people. The Nehru's 'Tribal-Panchsheel'<sup>2</sup> was neither isolation nor assimilation. He wanted to allow the people to develop by their genius and tradition rather than by over-administration and overloaded schemes. At the same time, he wanted to safeguard tribals from exploitation and judge the development by the quality of human character, not by the monetary statistics. According to Sangamitra Kannogo<sup>3</sup>, the major Pro-Tribal Forest Legislations in India were Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act- PESA 1996 and The Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act 2006, which were passed to recognize the rights of tribals over forest and forest land.

### Displacement and Rehabilitation

Displacement can be identified in a way as voluntary or disaster-related displacement and involuntary or development-induced displacement. In

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a sense, it is the eviction of an individual or a group of individuals or residents of a locality from their original habitats consequent upon the acquisition of land of the said area<sup>4</sup>. The possible reasons for the movement of the population are; natural catastrophes and calamities and the man-made reasons such as war, political division etc. Most of the people are affected by the developmental activities and large-scale development projects such as the construction of dams, irrigation, hydro, thermal power projects, manufacturing companies, sanctuaries, reserve forests, highways, roads etc. The industrialization and urbanization process in developing countries has largely increased the number of people affected by the development-induced displacement. Worldwide, about 15 million people are displaced every year by development<sup>5</sup>.

As observed by M. L. Patel<sup>6</sup>, due to the establishment and the commissioning of large projects, a large-scale population transfer has occurred. Since the location of the projects is generally in the backward areas lying outside the cities and towns, most of the displaced families either belong to the tribals or other backward communities. According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MTA) nearly 85 lakh tribals were displaced until 1990 on account of mega developmental projects like dams, mining, industries and conservation of forests etc. Lakhs of tribals have been displaced from 1990 onwards without proper rehabilitation<sup>7</sup>. Proponents of large dams argue that

only these types of massive projects can improve India's economy and the lives of millions of people. But the flip side of this sort of development is that it has displaced more than 42 million people in the country<sup>8</sup>. All these development activities of the government are frequently criticized by the people and authorities. Development is a must for the growth of the country in all the aspects but, at the same time it should be a sustainable development by considering the livelihood of the affected population.

The displacement in the state of Kerala is also not very less. As we saw earlier, the major problem related with tribal communities was landlessness which is the root cause of all other related problems. The Kerala Land Reforms Act 1963, with its "land to the tiller" policy, unfortunately changed the life condition of the tribal people of Kerala. Thousands of people were uprooted from their own land. 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 laborers. According to a study, Kerala witnessed a double increase in percentage of landless households in the last decade. The proportion of landless families in the state rose to 9.85 per cent in 2013 from 4.8 per cent in 2003<sup>9</sup>.

As mentioned by Dr. Haseena V. A in her research article, 150 tribal families were displaced due to the Neriamangalam Hydel Power Project in Idukki district, fourteen tribal families were displaced

Table No. 1 Number of Landless Tribal Families in Kerala

| No | Districts          | No of landless families | No. | Districts  | No of landless families |
|----|--------------------|-------------------------|-----|------------|-------------------------|
| 1  | Thiruvananthapuram | 27                      | 9   | Palakkad   | 695                     |
| 2  | Kollam             | 47                      | 10  | Malappuram | 598                     |
| 3  | Pathanamthitta     | 190                     | 11  | Kozhikkode | 117                     |
| 4  | Alappuzha          | 290                     | 12  | Wayanad    | 8263                    |
| 5  | Kottayam           | 150                     | 13  | Kannur     | 264                     |
| 6  | Idukki             | 117                     | 14  | Kasaragod  | 554                     |
| 7  | Ernakulam          | 234                     |     | Total      | 11,594                  |
| 8  | Thrissur           | 48                      |     |            |                         |

by Periyar Tiger Reserve project and around 100 to 150 tribal families were displaced of the Idamalayar irrigation project. In Attappady alone, over 10,796.19 acres of land had been alienated from tribal people between 1960 and 1980 in the state. They had been forcibly evicted from Muthanga forest during the 1970s after declaring the area as a sanctuary and in the 1980s for establishing eucalyptus plantations. It is reported that, despite the State Government launching a 'zero landless scheme,' more than 14,000 Tribal families remain landless in the state. There are 20,061 families who are homeless while 33,652 families live in houses deemed inhabitable<sup>10</sup>.

As per the details collected from the Directorate of Scheduled Tribes Development, the number of landless tribal families in the State is 11594, who need special attention and distribution of land and all other basic facilities. District wise details are shown below.

In an article published in India Today, C. K. Janu has said a different aspect of displacement and delay in the resettlement of tribal population. She alleges that the government has encroached upon over 600 acres of tribal land in Wayanad<sup>11</sup>.

Even though the various studies provide different statistics on displacement, the numbers are still in millions and majority of the population are still not resettled. So what is the use of such policies of which no one is benefitted? It is clear evidence that the formulation of policies is not appropriate to eliminate the existing socio-political disparities.

Resettlement is not just relocating people but also to provide them better-living conditions. It is the act of restoring something to its original state. When the displaced population are relocated or transferred to a particular area on a planned basis it is known as Resettlement or Rehabilitation. It is also restoring to former capacity or condition to make an improvement. Narendra Kumar Behra<sup>12</sup> identifies it as a physical resettlement or relocation of displaced people in nearby or distant places from the place of displacement or original habitat and it also refers to reinstatement or restoration (if possible up gradation)

of pre-displayed economic and social position.

As Cernea<sup>13</sup> observes, the state assumes a heavy political, economic and moral responsibility when it forces people to relocate and it has a statutory obligation not to leave them impoverished. There are many policies on resettlement and rehabilitation formulated at national level as well as at state level. The aim of these policies was to minimize large-scale displacement as far as possible and provide all required infrastructural facilities and amenities in the resettlement area. In Kerala, the recent initiative for the tribal resettlement is the formation of Tribal Resettlement and Development Mission (TRDM) in 2001. It was formulated with the objective to achieve overall socio-economic development of the tribal people and also to ensure the participation of tribals in the planning and implementation of the schemes meant for their development. TRDM was an ideal policy to eradicate landlessness and advancement of the tribal livelihood. But, how far this policy is a success is still a question and is criticized by many. So far TRDM has 39 tribal rehabilitated colonies in all over Kerala and distributed an extent of 9737.49 acres of land to 7718 landless tribal families and families having a nominal extent of lands in the districts except Thiruvananthapuram.

#### Problem Areas in Displacement And Rehabilitation

As mentioned earlier displacement and rehabilitation can be due to push factors and pull factors as voluntary and involuntary. In the case of voluntary displacement which is due to a natural calamity or disaster, if the government is supporting them to resettle in other risk reduced areas and providing them basic facilities to start over, people will praise government as it has done so much for the affected people. The same thing in case of a development-induced displacement the scenario is totally different. The positive aspects of displacement and rehabilitation can only be analyzed from the government's development perspective, not from the people's interests and survival.

Cernea<sup>14</sup> has acknowledged impoverishment risk and reconstruction model which proposes that impoverishment can be represented through a

Model of eight interlinked potential risks intrinsic to displacement such as: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, loss of access to common property, social disintegration, loss of access to community and violation of human rights. All these are the major challenges faced by the tribal people while they are uprooted from their original habitats.

When Kerala has the high human development index (0.79) in India, the tribal villages shows a very less growth and statistics and extreme poverty, malnutrition, poor living conditions etc. Reports indicate high infant mortality rates, severe malnutrition, premature births and low birth-weight in these regions. According to a study<sup>15</sup>, the infant mortality of Kerala in 2012 is 13 and infant mortality rate of India in 2012 is 47 per 1000 children, at the same time the infant mortality rate of Attappadi, a tribal block in Palakkad district of north Kerala, is 66<sup>16</sup>.

A famous news paper reported about the opinion of a tribal chief that, 'they never had issues of infant deaths and low immunity, earlier it is the change in their food habits and consumption patterns which is affecting them. Earlier they used to cultivate their own food-ragi, chama (bajra), millet and maize—and ate wild greens and meat. The decline in forest cover and natural resources has had a terrible impact on their living conditions'<sup>17</sup>. They are forced to get adapted to the new food pattern, which reduces their immunity. The question arises here is whether these people can adapt to the change physically as well as mentally. Forest Dwellers Act or the Forest Right Act is formulated in 2006, which provides tribals the access to the forest and collection of minor forest produces. But, so far it is not fully implemented in Kerala.

Through the resettlement policy, the maximum land allotted for the tribal people are either in the isolated forest areas or in the hilly terrains far away from the town areas, where they have a threat of wild animal attacks, water scarcity and unavailability of occupation or agricultural labor. If the people are relocating to distant places to find labor for their day

today living becomes a greater problem for them. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme has also failed to provide them economic support. In many cases, tribals are not been eligible for adequate compensation under India's Land Acquisition Act. Lack of schools near to the rehabilitated area is another issue of concern, which restricts their right to free and compulsory education. The clash between the tribal language and mother tongue, lack of teachers and lack of motivation increases the dropout rates and diminishes the interest of education among the children.

From all the above, the critical problem they face with displacement and rehabilitation is, they are losing their tribal identities. The government policies are putting them in a transitional zone between the tribals and nontribal. Whether the rehabilitation is making them de-tribalized or re-tribalized is still confusing.

### Politics of Development

Many writers<sup>18</sup> have observed that a policy framework is crucial for guiding and managing the resettlement project and the absence of a national legislation or legal vacuum in the relocation process is one of the major reasons for its failure in India. Dinesh Sharma has analyzed that the problem with tribal development in India is, the clubbing together of all the tribal communities of the state under the same scheduled tribal tag<sup>19</sup>. Each tribal community has different problems based on their geographical location and cultural practices. In that scenario, what will be the success rate of the creation of a national level policy for all the scheduled tribes of the state which is not applicable to the whole of India? Many state governments and private sectors have formulated their own resettlement policies. But, the increased amount of landlessness and poverty among them indicates the lack of proper monitoring system. Hence we can observe that whether the policy is national level or state level, the problem with the tribal people is not yet resolved. So what could be the next possible reason for their deprivation?

Resource allocation is a subject of politics not just a subject of economics or development. The

involvement of the politicians and political parties are very high in case of the tribal development. Crores of rupees have been allotted for the tribal welfare each year and still, there are landless people who are deprived of their basic rights, living in pathetic life conditions. If the people are not benefitted by these policies and also have not received any monetary benefits then, where does the allocated money went? The corrupt practices are rooted in our democratic system in such a way that policies are made not for the development of the people, but for the development of policy makers. The ideologies of the political parties might be different but the value of money is same for all. After all, today 'politics' have become synonymous with the 'ways and means by which the politicians work to remain in the political power'.

In Kerala, both the Left Democratic Front(LDF) and United Democratic Front (UDF) government could not solve the tribal issues even though the fund allocation during their period was almost similar. The tribal people are also ready to vote for the opposition parties, only to get their problems addressed. C.K. Janu in an interview stated that she does not feel it a crime to strike an electoral tie-up with a prominent political party (BJP) as both UDF and LDF never considered tribal politics and tribal organisations seriously and neglected them entirely.<sup>20</sup> Now the development is depending more and more upon the 'vote power' of the end groups and the politicians are using the development as a tool just to remain in power. It is clearly evident that the BJP Party in Kerala is providing more attention and support to these tribal groups to get their votes. The truth is that the life condition of the tribes in the BJP ruling states is not any better than that of Kerala. Ultimately the fact is that, the tribals have not gained from any of these political parties and they are just not willing to address the issues in tribal development.

When the pressure from the tribals on land relocation increases, the government will formulate a policy without considering the actual needs of the population excluding them from the policy formulation and avails it for the eligible tribal people. There should be mechanism to determine the eligible people which are grossly accepted by all the stake

holders. The absence of a strong monitoring system with any kind of legal backing on the resettlement of tribal people is the major reason behind the failure of rehabilitation policies. The abundant presence of bureaucratic excuses and the absence of political will which perpetuate a legal vacuum. The development programs meant for the tribes are planned in such a way that it benefits the non-tribals more than the tribals. The fund allocated for the tribal welfare is not fully utilized for them. The red-tapism, corruption, the interdepartmental clashes, official's personal egos, middlemen, commission, influence of money and power etc. are the few reasons which restrict the flow of fund allocation of tribal resettlement projects. Sandwiched between the politics of the politicians and the bureaucrats, the poor tribal people are suffering endlessly. Such issues ought to be addressed and immediate actions should be taken to provide them for the better standard of living.

### Suggestions

The much hyped 'Kerala Model of Development' has delivered only minimally to the tribal population of Kerala. The state politics is oscillating between developments of the larger public on the one hand and the development of tribes on the other hand, which are generally antithetical to each other. The development policies devised for the benefit of the tribes do not satisfy their immediate or long term interests. The politicians should look to implement the policies in a better way with minimum corruption and try to deliver it with maximum efficiency. In the era of globalization, if the government thinks integration of the tribal development with market model of development is necessary, they should develop such model with the consent of all the stake holders. The power structures operating in the society which curbs the tribal development for their vested interests should be identified and a holistic solution of such problems should be devised. Tribal community should be involved in policy making. The government should tirelessly work to bring consensus among the public and among the tribes about the policies they make for tribal development, because once such consensus is made in the grassroots level, implementation of such policies could be done with minimum hindrances.

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Government should bring transparency in the tribal policies and many Nongovernmental organizations which work in the grassroots level with the tribes should be involved in all the stages of policy framework for bringing more consensus as said earlier. The debate of Isolation vs. assimilation should be sorted out amicably with the consent of all the tribes involved. The tribes should be educated about the benefits of assimilation with larger society and by such a process government can try to build consensus for future projects and programmes. Government should never forget that in a true democracy the people should be given free hand to decide their future. If government deems it as ultimate necessary to disturb the life of a group of people, then government should create political mechanism to create consensus among the group about the government policy before such a disturbance actually happens. Hence only if 'consensus' precede development activities, we can call ourselves a true democracy.

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