

CHAPTER – I

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Change and continuity are said to be universal. From time immemorial all societies and cultures have been changing, sometimes rapidly and at other times relatively slowly. This is also true of all tribal societies. The tribals constitute an important segment of the population of India. India has the second largest tribal population after Africa, constituting 8.8 per cent of the total population of the nation as per 1991 census. Tribals have attracted the attention and concern of scholars and administrators, politicians and social workers. This is because they differ significantly from non-tribal population.

The word 'Tribe' in India refers to a class of people, incorporated into the list of Scheduled Tribes. It has carried diverse connotations in different countries. However in India the term 'tribe' conveys a meaning of the bewildering and enchanting group of people. It refers to preliterate, localized social groups, the members of which speak a common dialect. The tribal people have been known by various names such as Adivasi, Vanavasi, Vanyajati, Adimjati, Girianj and Pahari. Tribe has been defined as a group of indigenous people having common name, language and territory tied by strong kinship bonds, practicing endogamy, having distinct customs, rituals and belief etc. Such definitions are not very helpful because we find lot of variations in the life style of different tribes.

Kerala is famous for its high levels of social development despite its relatively low GDP. With literacy over 90 percent and life expectancy of 72 years it outperforms all other major Indian states. Indeed, the state's "development experience" from the late 1950s till the late 1980s, which saw the most rapid decline in poverty anywhere in India has been coined the 'Kerala model' of successful 'human' development, relying on redistributive government interventions spurred by the 'public action' of politically informed citizens. The Communist party, around which earlier reform movements and peasant uprisings crystallized in the course of the 1940s and which

first came to power in 1957, played a crucial role in setting the tone for Kerala's development experience. But so did its regular exclusion from power by its rival, the Congress party, which resulted in 'competitive politics' to improve general welfare.

Tribals in Kerala are living on the hill ranges, mainly on the Western Ghat, bordering Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. As a natural border, the mountain has branches in Kerala as well as in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The tribals on the Kerala hills are only listed here. It is estimated that there are about 4 lakh tribal people living in Kerala and about half of this population has made the interiors of Wayanad their home. The tribals were the original inhabitants of Wayanad region. But once the British era opened roads to this region and commercial plantations began to sprout, there occurred a migration of settlers to this region and during the 1940s this migration enhanced tremendously displacing the aborigines or adivasis of the area. The tribes lost their land and dwindled in numbers and now they constitute only 20 percent of the total population of the district.

Tribes in Kerala generally live in the hilly ranges, mainly in the Western Ghats, bordering Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. As a natural border, the Ghats has branches in Kerala as well as in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. They are reckoned as the descendants of the Negrito race. A majority of the tribes of Kerala build their settlements in the dense forest grounds and also on the top of the mountains. As a result of the rocky topography of the region, the tribes of Kerala remained undisturbed by any kind of invasion from the foreigners. The tribes of Kerala differ from each other depending upon the region they reside. All the tribes of Kerala constitute rich, unique, varied and critical element of Indian tradition. The major tribes of Kerala are Kurichyar, Kurumar, Urali, Paniyan, Kanikkar, Kadar etc.

The native Adivasis of the district belong to various sects like Paniyas, Kurumas, Adiyars, Kurichyas, Ooralis, Kattunaikkans and Uraali Kurumas.

They are mostly physically distinguishable with darker skin and stout built physique. They often live in houses made of thatched roof, mud, bamboo and brick houses set in swampy valleys and plateaus. Though many of them said to be primitive tribes, all of

them have a story of migration to the hills. It is likely to believe that these tribes were living there for several centuries! “The story of tribes on the Western Ghat mountainous ranges have is less than 300 years”, says Philipose Vaidyar who had visited and stayed with several of these tribal groups. Cholanaikkan is said to be the most primitive and a vanishing tribe. “Discussions with them, and the history during the British times, the capture of local kings and their fights have much to reveal about their migration from the valley to the hills” he says. Read more about Tippu Sulthan and Pazhassi King and learn how some people were lost in the deep forests. The Irular people of Idukki districts complaint about the heavy taxes they had to pay to the kings which resulted in their exodus from the Kochi kingdom to that of an animal kingdom. History of British period approves this.

The tribes of Kerala State have developed keen faith on spiritualism and religion. Almost all the tribes of Kerala follow religion, which is centered round animism. They appease devils for calamities and sickness. Apart from this, there is a lot of local Gods and Goddesses, whom majority of the tribes of Kerala respect and show immense esteem and veneration. Worship of Amman or Goddess Kali and Ayyan or Ayyappan is quite common.

The highest concentration of the Scheduled Tribes in Kerala is seen in Wayanad district (37.36 %) followed by Idukki (14 %) and Palakkad (10.8 %). In Kerala, the adivasis constitute 1.1 percent to the total population. The adivasis in Kerala are not only geographically concentrated, but are overwhelmingly rural. The celebrated Kerala model of development has not made much change for the socio-economic life of the marginalized sections of Kerala. The problems faced by the tribes are numerous like severe levels of poverty, denial and helplessness, high levels of exclusion, both developmental and social, extreme low levels of empowerment, political, social and economic, rapid marginalization due to unfair, unequal and exploitative relations of production, and exchange between tribal communities and others, low level of access to entitlements, practically zero participation in development matters with no self-sufficiency in any form of decision making, strangely huge siphoning of developmental resources and benefits meant for tribal people, by middlemen, poor human development with low levels of literacy and access to health care, rapid

alienation of assets like land, alarming depletion of social capital, particularly traditional forms of organization and leadership, quick deterioration of traditional knowledge systems and cultural attainments, fast-increasing tendency to use tribal people as cat's-paws in criminal activities like illicit distillation, cultivation of narcotic plants, stealing of forest wealth etc, high levels of exploitation of women by outsiders, weak delivery system of public services, dependency-inducing developmental programmes relying on distribution of benefits, rather than building up of capabilities, implementation of ad-hoc and stereo-typed developmental programmes in the absence of proper planning and very weak monitoring systems.

Even after 68 years after Independence, the country is very backward according to the developmental index. The tribes of the country still remain marginalized and most of them are still considered as the most vulnerable sections of the society. In spite of the fact that some of the tribal groups in Kerala have flourished and conquered envious heights, most of the others still remain in the backdrops of any kind of social, economic or educational development. Their problems range from poverty and indebtedness, to poor health and malnutrition, to illiteracy, to unemployment, to land alienations.