

# Contradictions of the development model of the state of Kerala, India: the tribal population

## Contradicciones del modelo de desarrollo del estado de Kerala, India: la población tribal

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### Abstract

Kerala state has been the forerunner of development model in India and all over the world. However, while considering the case of tribal population, we come across a number of problems. Poverty, hunger, land lessens, poor health, poor education, low economic conditions. This study discusses the present condition of the tribes of Kerala. A state with outstanding development indicators fails to address the needs of tribal population.

**Keywords:** marginalization, tribal communities, kerala development model.

### Resumen

El estado de Kerala ha sido el precursor del modelo de desarrollo en India y en todo el mundo. Sin embargo, al considerar el caso de la población tribal, nos encontramos con una serie de problemas. La pobreza, el hambre, la tierra, la mala salud, la mala educación, las bajas condiciones económicas. Este estudio discute la condición actual de las tribus de Kerala. Un estado con indicadores de desarrollo sobresalientes no responde a las necesidades de la población tribal.

**Palabras clave:** marginación, comunidades tribales, modelo de desarrollo de kerala.

## 1. Introduction

The Kerala state in India is well known for its socio economic development model and practices. Located in the southern end of peninsular India it ranks first in Human Development Index among the twenty-eight Indian states. Kerala development is evidence that even most poor societies can attain high living standards. It is one of the smallest states in the country. Despite of being a small state of India, Kerala shares its development statistics with some of the leading developing countries. (Saseendran & Martinez, 2018). The state has a population of 34.8 million, which is 2.76 percentage of the total population of the country. The development indicators of the state can be compared with some of the developed American and European countries like Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, United States of America and Russia. Kerala state has its distinctive achievements in the areas of Literacy rate 93.91 percentage (males 96.02 percentage and females 91.98percentage), Life expectancy 74, Sex Ratio (female 1084 male 1000) and Infant Mortality 12 death for 1000 live birth (Census India, 2011). The

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population of Kerala is greater than some of the developing countries like Canada, Australia, Denmark, Sweden, and is as big as some of the third world countries like Sri Lanka, Malaysia etc. (Parayil & Sreekumar, 2003). The Kerala model of development also emphasizes on poverty reduction, land reforms, access to education and social welfare. The emergence of Kerala Model was motivated by various public actions through politically motivated and informed citizens. (Steur, 2009).

### 1.1. Background

Socio-economic and political history of the state have significant influence in shaping the policy formulation and governance in Kerala. This started with Renaissance movement during the first half of the 1900s, which later intensified towards the end of the British rule in India in 1947. The social Reform movements in Kerala, especially among the lower caste (socially deprived/marginalized) communities were against local property owners and rulers demanding basic social needs. Most important reform movements were against the discrimination practices and untouchability in the religious and caste system. Eminent social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, Sahodaran Ayyappan, Chattambi Swami, V.T.Bhattathirippadu, etc. led these struggles. A major popularizer of the Kerala model was the nobel laureate, Amartya Sen (Dreze & Sen, 1989) Dreze and Sen argument had the major flaw that they do not make even a mention of the penurious social situation of the marginalised social groups in Kerala society, namely, Adivasis, Dalits, fisherfolk and to some extent, women. The relative deprivation and social discrimination against these sections or "the 'Outlier' phenomenon" remains a black spot in the Kerala experience that is too stark to be overlooked (Thramangalam,2006).

The levels of disparity between the historically marginalized sections, namely, Dalits, Adivasis, fisher people, etc. and the mainstream society in the state presents a stark contrast in terms of both human development and economic development indices. In some cases, it is even more pronounced than at the all-India level.

These social movements laid the foundation for the emergence of more secular movements, alongside the working class, which lead to the formation of a radical left political orientation in the state. In 1957, the world's first democratically elected communist government came in to power in Kerala state. This government initiated various welfare measures in favour of the peasants and working class like land reforms, ensuring minimum wages, abolition of tenancy and improving working conditions. It also created a great assertion of self-respect and dignity among the agricultural labours and small peasants in Kerala (Kurien, 1995). Land reform movement with constitutional support and free and compulsory education and free public health care system enhanced the society. Beneath the macro level, social indicators there are some hard micro realities influencing the Kerala Model (Ramanathaiyer & MacPherson, 2018). Kerala's tribal communities (Scheduled tribes), Dalit (lower caste people), fishermen, cashew workers and coir workers are still lagging behind others in terms of social development indicators (Kurien, 1995; Omvedt, 1998). The most important critic towards the Kerala model of development is that it could not make a successful model in mainstreaming the marginalized sections of the society such as tribes and fishermen in particular. When the main stream of the society enjoyed the living standards of developed nations these communities remained to be deprived. There has been numerous efforts and policies formulated for upbringing them, but the success rate of those programs were unsatisfactory.

While discussing the historical factors, which lead to the deprivation of Kerala's marginalized communities – tribes, fishermen and Dalit lower cast – we come across a number of observations. Social and community reform movements had significant control in shaping the progressive growth of the Kerala society. The socio reform movements originated in each segment of the society dealt with the then existing evil practices and discriminations within that particular segment or community. Yogakshemasabha, Nair Service Society (NSS), Sree Narayana Dharma Pariplana Sangham (SNDP) are some of the most important socio reforms in Kerala. These movements later transformed themselves as a collective power, which politically negotiated the respective community interests with the state. The above three movements represented the majority of the population.

There was a movement lead by Ayyankali on behalf of the Dalit community, but they could not ensure the continuation of this movement after Ayyankali. Fishermen and Tribal communities are a minority section of the Kerala society and thus their reform movements couldn't strengthen enough to become a powerful social presence, and hence they could not be a negotiate power (Tharakan, 2006)

Land reform movement was yet another key factor in the upward social mobility of the Kerala society. However, the least benefited communities from this reform are the tribes, fishermen and Dalit. The land reform act exempted the plantation areas, tribal communities mostly lived in forest areas and plantations could not benefit from this act. Fishing communities lived in the seashores, which is considered Poramboke land (land that belongs to the government). They were denied the Kudikidapp (document that helps to ascertain whether the property is free from all claims such as mortgages, leases, unpaid debts etc.) right hence they were not farmland peasants. In the case of Dalit farmer peasants, they were just given the right to own the piece of their dwelling land. They could not claim the farmland because they were not farmers. They were farmland peasants only. These a few things restricted in the social and cultural growth of the marginalized sections of the Kerala society.

Land alienation has been yet another factor for the deprivation that tribal communities have faced and continue to face. This can be understood if we try to analyse the percentage of agricultural labourers from tribal in Kerala. Within a span of 15 years (1961-1976) the percentage of agricultural labourers among tribal increased from 43 percentage to 72 percentage. Highest incidence of land alienation is reported in Kerala (Bijoy & Raman, 2003). In addition to that, livelihoods of tribes are made vulnerable by small land holdings, lack of capital and infrastructure to carry out agriculture, conflict with wild animals especially elephants, and drought in rain fed agricultural areas because of poor rainfall. Malnourishment among tribal people is directly related to food and indirectly related to non-food factors. Inadequate food intake being the immediate factor, lack of employment opportunities, landlessness, decline in agriculture, reduction in forest cover, ineffective government policies etc. cumulatively contribute to insecurity of tribal people.

This article attempts to discuss the two of the most prominent indicators of human development, education and health. Kerala state in India is famous for its development model. Kerala's Education and health sectors rank first in the country. However, the same of that of the tribal communities in the state is at time lower than some of the most under developed countries. There are some tribal hamlets in Palakkadu district, Attappadi region, which have the worst life expectancy and living conditions. The life expectancy in the state is 74, while the life expectancy in some areas of Attapady tribal region is less than fifty. There is a wide gap between the Kerala society and the tribal population of the state.

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## 2. Methodology

The main objective of this research is to contextualize that the development model of the state of Kerala, recognized for its worldwide achievements in certain areas of human development indicators, has not managed to impact the tribal population it has. The study is using a mixed, correlational research method that aims to describe and analyze how the development model has contemplated the inclusion or exclusion of the tribal population. By means of sociodemographic data, they are systematized for the characterization of the tribal population, a review of government documents, statistics and recognized authors on the subject is made and by contrasting with reality in points such as literacy, health standards, access to drinking water , infant mortality rate, economic condition, poverty rate, policies, and tribal development programs, the model is explained; the research questions asked are: how can it be considered a successful development program, if it marginalizes a sector of the culturally important population? Is the success of the development model measured by economic indicators, the human development index, and not by the contextualization of the understanding of the

aspirations, and the human and cultural capacities of the population? Is the model just another implementation of a false development, which completely discards the existing reality and imposes indicators as well?

The methodology is based on socio-economic and political understanding, analysis of primary and secondary sources on a political economy of the state, involving the Marxist dialectical method of explaining social reality in terms of a whole.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Tribal population

Tribes constituted 4% of the global population, two hundred million tribal people are found in many regions of the world. In India, 725 tribal communities are scheduled under article 342 of the Indian constitution. Majority (50 percentage) of the tribal communities are in central and northeast state of the nation. As mentioned in table 1, Kerala state has 1.45 percentage of tribal population, which is distributed in 36 different type of tribes.

**Table 1**  
Tribal Population over years.

ST population (in million)			Decadal growth in from 2001-2011	% of STs in the state population in 2011
1991	2001	2011		
320967	364189	4848987	33.13	1.45

Source: Census of India 2001, 2011

According to the 2011 census, there are 119,788 tribal households in the state. The total population of tribal community is 484,839. The tribal population of Kerala constitutes 1.5 percentage of the total population of the state. The district Wayanad has the highest number of tribal concentration in the state. The districts Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad, Kasaragod and Kannur contribute more than 70 percentage of the state's tribal population. The overall sex ratio among the tribes is 1035 females for 1000 males.

#### 3.2. Literacy and health

Literacy rate among the Indian tribes is 59 percentage according to census 2011, among males, it is 68.5 percentage and among females, it is 49.4 percentage. It is actually lower than national average of literacy rate, which is 74 percentage. Major five tribal groups in India are Bhils, Gonds, Santhals, Minas, Naikdas and Oraons and among these Bhils are most populous tribe in India. The state Kerala dominates in the areas of Literacy rate (93.91 percentage) comparing to other states of India. Literacy rate among the tribes are 67 percent, (table 2) Census 2011 states that 32.71 percentage of Kerala's tribal population is illiterate. In 2001, it was 35 percent. Yet a three percent growth is too less for a state like Kerala. Literacy mission activities is also worst in tribal areas. Technically, we can observe some slight progress in the sector of child education among the Kerala tribes. Their primary School inscription rate is increasing by 1.39 percentage every year. The school dropout rate is also coming down from 4.53 percentage to 1.56 percentage during the **period 2007 – 2012 (Government of Kerala, 2012)**.

**Table 2**  
Tribal Literacy

	Literacy (Overall) in percentage	Literacy (ST) in percentage
India	74	59
Kerala	94	67

Source: Census of India 2001, 2011

As per the census of India report 2011, the tribal literacy rate is found to be far below the overall literacy rate. In national level, the female literacy is very pathetic comparing to the total female literacy. In the state, Kerala also there is a disparity between overall literacy and tribal literacy. Some of the tribal communities like Paniya, Kattunayakka, are still living in the primitive form and illiterate. Government has introduced many programmes for the literacy campaign, but it constantly failed in promoting tribal literacy.

“To Enjoy the highest health standards is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic and social condition”. Health is a fundamental issue faced by the tribes in Kerala. High infant mortality and Maternal mortality, Nutritional deficiency, Sickle cell anaemia, tuberculosis, Cancer, etc. highly prevail among the tribes of Kerala. In the aspect of health standards, the tribal communities are way below to that of the Kerala standards. According to the census 2011 only 16.7 percentage of tribal households have the access to clean drinking water. Another 10 percent households are using impure water resources. The rest are using small streams running through the forest regions. The in availability of septic latrines in the tribal colonies are polluting the streams. These people consume this water, which makes them exposed to various diseases. Infant mortality rate among the tribal communities is 17.3 while that of the general category male child is 9 and female child is 12. (UNDP, 2009). The national health survey of 2005-06 reveals that 77.7 percent of the tribes use various tobacco products and 33.1 percentage are using alcohol. This tendency prevails among both men and women. This is creating serious health problems. 28.6 percent of households have no toilet facilities, and many families having this facility is not using it. Open defecation is yet another factor, which creates health problems among the tribal population.

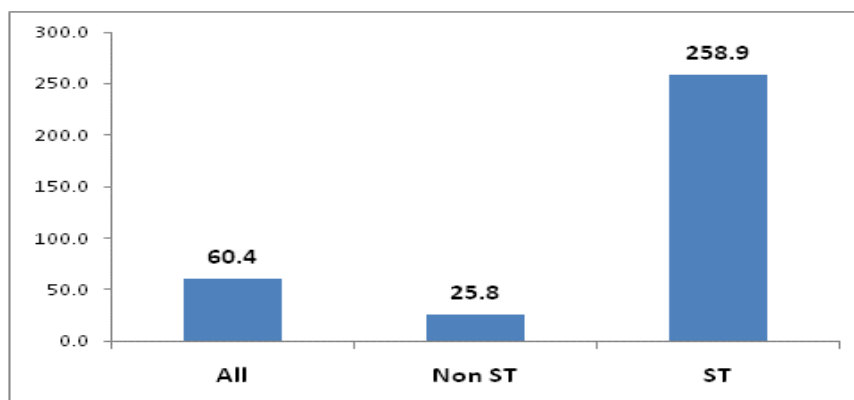
**Table 3**  
Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)

	Sample Female population	Live Births	Maternal deaths	Maternal mortality rate (MMR)
India	5678691	436411	926	212
Kerala	287854	14624	12	81

Source: Census of India 2011

As per the census report, (2011) the maternal deaths at the national level is 926 while that of Kerala state is 12. In addition, the mortality rate is 212 and in Kerala 81 (table 3). Malnutrition is yet another serious problem found among the tribal communities of Kerala. This is much severe among the women. The rate of sickle cell anaemia patients is increasing among them. Among the Paniya tribal community, it is 30.7 percentage, Kuruma Tribal community it is 29 percentage. The increased use of tobacco and alcohol is accelerating the growth of this disease among the tribal communities of Kerala.

**Figure 1**  
Maternal mortality - Wayanad District Kerala



Source: Kannan et al., 1991, Tribal Health in Kerala.

There is a serious gap between tribes and non-tribes in the case of maternal mortality (Figure 1). The negligence of the state health care system towards the tribes is very much visible. Tribal women and children are vulnerable to health problem. The researchers and policy makers need to respond with knowledge, policies and programs that can together make some significant changes in the health status of tribes.

### 3.2. Economic condition

The poor economic conditions of tribal people is a serious concern. Majority of tribal families have low economic standards, they belong to below poverty line (BPL) category (Government of Kerala, 2009). According to the study of C K Krishnan, poor socio economic conditions are a major factor contributing towards the educational achievement and low aspirations on the part of tribal folk. Agriculture and allied activities are main source of livelihood of the tribal communities.

**Table 4**  
Poverty Ratio among Scheduled  
Tribes from 1993-94 and 2003-04

	1993-1994		2004- 2005		Total
	ST	All	ST	All	
India	51.94	36.8	47.2	16.1	27.5
Kerala	37.34	25.76	44.3	6.6	15

Source: Rural Development Statistics, Government of Kerala, India

Comparing the tribal Poverty ratio of 1993 to 2005 have greater significance, at the national level poverty rate has decreased by five percent but in Kerala state, it has increased from 37.34 in 1994 to 44.3 in 2005. It shows the negligence and inadequacy of the Kerala development model in the case of tribal people. When other communities are rapidly developing, tribes remain to continue in their pathetic situation.

### 3.3. Tribal development policies and programs

The government of India has notified that the tribal people are a vulnerable section of Indian society. Policies and legislations are made with special safeguards for the protection and development of the tribal communities. The provisions aim to promote education, economic interest and protection from exploitation and social injustices. It is being implemented through policies and programs and through the mechanism of reservation. Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) is implemented at places where the tribal population is above 50 percentage and Modified Area Development Approach (MADA) for the small pockets with less tribal population. Government of Kerala has implemented many programs for the tribal development over the last decade. Some of the plan schemes implemented by the Kerala state scheduled tribe development department under tribal sub plan are furnished below.

- Resettlement of Landless Tribes
- Package program for the Rehabilitation of backward tribes.
- Various diseases affect treatment and Rehabilitation of ST.
- Financial assistance to Marriage of ST Girls.
- Restoration of Alienated land Act 1999.
- Insurance program for tribes
- Repairs and Maintenance of Tribal Hostel.
- Schemes for providing better educational facilities to bright ST students.
- Bharath /Kerala Darshan program to ST Students.
- Post -metric hostels for Tribal Students.
- Tribal Youth festivals and Development Of Sports Infrastructure

- Training On Information Technology
- Extension of Kudumbashree (women development scheme of the government of Kerala) to Tribal areas
- Organizations and Training of Oorukootams (a collective of tribal hamlet)
- Opening of Grain Banks System in Tribal Areas

Despite of all these efforts by the state and central governments, the living conditions of the tribal population is still not changed radically. There has been some advancements in the area of education and health. However, those are not even adequate. Reservations has been made for the scheduled tribes in all sectors. The governments over the past seventy years set up special schools, health centres with free medical care and community kitchens etc. Yet, there is a lot more to do.

We do not mean to underestimate the validity and usefulness of the concept of 'human development' as distinct from 'economic development', logically derivable from the studies on the developmental experience of Kerala. It has rightly been pointed out, "Sen has succeeded in detaching the discipline of Economics from its positivist lifelessness ('Economists would also call it scientific') and making it socially relevant by lending it nonnative dimensions." Nevertheless, we would hasten to add that a symptomatic treatment of social maladies is insufficient and that we need to strike at the root causes of social maladies addressing the principal contradictions, targeting the principal structures of oppression at the micro-levels of classes and social groups, at the meso-level of the national formation and the macro-plane at the country and global levels.

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#### 4. Conclusions

Kerala is often known for its development indicators and its robust form of decentralized governance. Death of malnourished children in Attapady, Palakkad district of Kerala, is happening at the same time when debates were going on the Kerala model of development. This stark contradiction is reflected in all tribal pockets of Kerala. Deprivation faced by the tribal people in Kerala shows the gross inequality that they are facing today. Malnourishment happens when body fails to get right amount of nutrition. It is a dehumanizing condition, which affects the dignity of the individual. Tribes of Kerala are suffering with the problems of land lessens, poverty, diseases including (TB, Cancer, Sickle cell anaemia), poor housing, unemployment etc. It shows the contradictory between tribal development and Kerala Development model.

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