Tribal Welfare and Development in Kerala

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There are as many as 35 known tribal communities in Kerala. They are mostly agriculturists, though some have acquired skills in basket-making, mat-making, weaving and carpentry. Collection of minor forest produce and firewood is generally done by them. From the sophisticated Kurichians of Wynad to the cave-dwelling Cholanaickans of Nilambur one may find the traditional tribalism. While the all India population percentage is seven, Kerala has a tribal population of 261,475 as per 1981 census. Tribal concentration can be found in the forest areas in Mananthody, Kalpatta, Nilambur, Thodupuzha, and Punalur in the State of Kerala. In other forest areas in the State they are thinly populated. 20.02 per cent of the tribals in Kerala are literate. In the year 1983-84 Rs. 3,50,76,500 was provided in the budget of the State of Kerala for the welfare and development of the tribal people.

A glance through the available data and documents will prove the basic fact that the various tribes have more or less

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1. Important among them are Paniyan, Kurichiyan, Adiyan, Kuruman, Kattunaickan of Wynad, Cholanaickans of Nilambur, Kurumpan, Mudugas and Irulas of Attapadi, Manna, Oorali, Muduvans and Pallayans of Highranges as well as Mala Araya of Thodupuzha and Kanikars of Trivandrum.

2. The percentage of the tribal population of the State is 1.03 whereas on All India level the percentage is 7.

3. Like Garo, Khasi, Angamy, Mizo or Kachari of Assam, Kuki or Dimasa of Nagaland, Mishami, Lamba or Togin of North East (f. n. contd.)
similar basic characteristics. At the same time each sect and region has got its own peculiar characteristics also. Undoubtedly the tribal people, who are the most downtrodden group living in primitive conditions, deserve special attention.

It was therefore quite natural that our Constitution makers discussed the problem of tribal welfare and development along with that of Harijans and backward classes and made ample provisions in the Constitution to enable the Central and State Governments to take up planned welfare and development programmes aimed at developing tribal people on par with other comparatively better sections of the population. Based on the provisions in the Constitution the Government of India and State Governments have from time to time framed various rules and regulations and issued a series of executive orders. The

Frontier Agency, Gaddis, Thakkar, or Khambas of Himachal Pradesh, Juang, Gadaba, Poroja, or Gonda of Orissa; Bhil, Worli, Kolena or Kathods of Maharashtra; Saora, Chenchu, Koya, Valmiki, Mukha Dora or Bhagata of Andhra Pradesh; Hakkippikki, Jannu Kurumpa, Kadu Kurumba, or Sligari Yerava of Karnataka; Irular, Paniyar, Kadar, Mudugar, or Sholagur of Tamilnadu and Adiyan, Paniyan, Kurichian, Kurumban, Malayan, Muthuvan, Kattunaickkan or Kanikkars of Kerala.

4. In this context the following guidelines enumerated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his forward to Verrier Elwin's Philosophy for NEFA is worthy of being noted.

1. "People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their traditional art and culture."

2. "Tribal rights in land and forest should be protected."

3. "We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially in the beginning but we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into the tribal territory."

4. "We should not over administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions."

5. "We should judge results, not the statistics or the amount of (f. n. contd.)
steps taken by Central and State Governments have brought in good results though not as much as was expected. The Prime Minister observed, during the meeting of State Ministers of Welfare of Backward Classes held at Delhi in April 1975:

“It has been our policy even during the Independence movement that we should try not only for political freedom, but for a freedom which brings social justice to all sections of our people. And we have placed special emphasis on the position of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Perhaps, at that moment not so much emphasis had been given to the so called backward classes because we had not realised that they might not get full justice. As we, progressed, we found that growth by itself does not bring about this equality and therefore we had to modify our stand somewhat. It was in our minds, but it has not been spelt out, that growth must be accompanied by social justice not merely as an ideal, not merely as humanitarian or charitable reasons, but even for the purposes of growth and progress itself. Because when there is no social justice, there is bound to be tension and disharmony. And disharmony will interfere and hamper economic growth. So all these problems are very closely linked.”

This conference is certainly a landmark in the post-independent developmental activities. After detailed examination and deliberation, 14 important issues were tabulated and resolutions were passed in the meeting in respect of tribals, suggesting the guidelines and methods for future action.

These resolutions highlight the desirable legal and administrative steps for tribal upliftment. The said resolutions are given below with note showing the position in Kerala in respect of the matter covered by each resolution.

money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.”

The above five points were considered as the corner stones for tribal welfare and development in independent India.
**Resolution 1(a)**

Legislation for prevention of land alienation should be undertaken immediately, if such a legislation does not exist in a State. Where such legislation are already there, a review should be done to find the loopholes for rectification. This work should be done as early as possible and in any case within a period of 6 months. What is more important is the implementation of the legislative measures for prevention of land alienation and restoration of alienated land. A crash programme for effectively implementing these laws within two years may be prepared in each State clearly setting targets for each year which should be periodically reviewed.

Due to the extra-ordinary efforts put in by the then Harijan Welfare Minister the Legislative Assembly passed “the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act 1975 aimed at protecting tribes from further alienations of land and also for restoring to them the lost lands. Though the resolution of State Ministers contains directions to have a crash programme for preventing alienation and restoration of law, the Government of Kerala, after obtaining President’s assent for the Act, did not frame Rules and notify the date of enforcement of the Act, evidently due to the pulls and pressures of politics. The position remains the same even today in spite of utmost importance being attached to tribal welfare programmes. The situation will not change unless the usurpers of land are denied of their political control. One can only wait for better days.

**Resolution 1(b)**

In case of acquisition of land for public purpose, there should be a simultaneous programme for comprehensive rehabilitation as a part of the project itself.

In Kerala this is accepted in principle and adopted in most of the cases.
Resolution 2

Liquor vending should end in tribal areas. The members of Scheduled Tribes should be allowed to brew liquor for personal and social purpose but not for commercial purposes. In pursuance of this policy, the laws should be suitably amended urgently and vending by contractors should be abolished during the current year itself. The vending through government shops should also be phased out. In areas, where there is considerable mixing of population and the tribals are not in majority, the sale may be through government shops only.

Nothing specific has been done in Kerala except that authorised shops for both foreign and native liquor are licensed and established in almost all tribal pockets. There is need for special legislation and executive action if the desired beneficial effect is to be achieved among tribes especially because liquor is one of the weapons used by exploiters to attract tribes.

Resolution 3

Tribals should have unfettered and unqualified right to collect the minor forest produce. If there are any procedural or legal difficulties, they may be sorted out immediately. There should be a remunerative minimum price for each item of minor forest produce and its marketing should be arranged either through the Department or through a co-operative society or corporation.

Co-operative movement have entered the tribal sector also as part of the vigorous co-operative movement in other sectors in the State. There are 57 Girijans' co-operative societies among which only about a dozen are functioning satisfactorily.

In the year 1978 Government ordered to give monopoly collection rights of minor forest produce to these Girijan societies under the control and supervision of a Committee. 5 Over

5. The Committee consisted of the Chief Conservator of Forests, Registrar of Co-operative Societies, The Director of Tribal Welfare, the (f. n. contd.)
and above this, recently, Kerala Government has formed Harijan | Girijan Development Co-operative Federation to strengthen all Harijan | Girijan Societies to arrange finance for the societies and to undertake commercial activities including marketing of agricultural products and minor forest produce. Co-operative department has been suitably expanded for this purpose. But as in the case of primary co-operative societies all the arrangements so far made have not become successful in eliminating middle men and exploiters. In one form or other they gain access to this sector and exploitation takes place. It appears that only replacement of exploiters and not removal of exploitation has been the result of all past orders and activities.

There is need for more effective legislation and executive action in this vital field. A change of heart among the political leaders and social workers is also a basic need in order to eliminate exploiters. If exploitations is removed success is certain as has happened in the States where the tribes are in a majority.

**Resolution 4**

Forest labour Co-operative societies may be organised as far as possible. Major forestry operations may also be executed through them.

Kerala Government has issued direction to the Forest Department to utilise the services of available tribal people wherever possible. This is being done. Some workers are given training every year to handle timber and to do allied work. But all the measures cover only a negligible few and is not sufficient to make an impact. More over the relationship between forest officials and tribes is seen to be strained mostly on account of the strong action being taken against tribal people for petty offences and even against legitimate collection of minor forest produce. The tribal people allege that at the same time officials wilfully

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ignore or tolerate large scale malpractices by influential plainsmen. There is therefore need for special legislation and executive action. This is urgent and important, for, forest areas are being destroyed. Major development activities are being carried out in forests without tribal participation. This is against the spirit of the resolution.

**Resolution 5**

The tribals living in forest villages may be given rights over land which may be inalienable. Provision should also be made for extending the benefits of agricultural development programmes to these forest villagers including the plantation of fruit-bearing trees.

Only in cases of genuine possession, this has been done. Tribal people have been driven out by force and the exploiters have taken possession of the land on the basis of cooked up documents. Legislative and Executive measures with dedicated political leadership are needed to help the tribal people.

**Resolution 6**

A unified credit-cum-marketing structure as advised by the Expert Group (Bawa committee) should be created immediately in the tribal areas as a backing to the programme of land redemption and debt redemption. This organisation should cover all the tribals in the area. In particular, the system should cater to the following requirements:

(a) arrange for the purchase of all the products that the tribal normally sells in the market including the minor forest produce that he collects;

(b) arrange for the supply to him of the basic necessities of life at fair prices.

(c) allow for a sufficient production credit for a supervised production programme on his land;

(d) arrange for consumption credit during the period of cultivation at a reasonable level to be worked off from the harvested producer; and
(e) arrange for taking over the debts of the tribal in a “debt redemption programme” to be worked off on the basis of a suitable programme as may be formulated.

A programme of “debt redemption” and scaling down of debts should be taken up immediately. The relevant laws may be reviewed within the next three months. A simultaneous programme for scaling down of debt and its redemption as well as for setting up of the credit-cum-marketing structure should be so phased as to cover the entire tribal area in two years. Specific targets may be set for each year which may be reviewed periodically.

Nothing much has been done in this except through the co-operative societies and by way of occasional relief measures adopted through the department of Tribal Welfare. Debt redemption programme is also partially implemented through some of the relief programmes. These actions touch only the fringe of the problem and serves publicity purpose only. For effective help further legislative and executive measures are required.

RESOLUTION 7

A Steering Committee consisting of representatives of the Department of Co-operation, Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Banking and the Reserve Bank of India may be constituted at the national level to guide the change-over and sort out, without any time lag, the problems which may arise in relation to implementation of the new policy.

The Tribal Welfare Director of Kerala State is also a member in the Kerala Branch of the national Co-operative Development Council with a view to help removal of hardships faced by tribals for raising loans from banks and other institutions. Much help could not be given by banks on account of the helplessness of the tribal people to furnish adequate security for money advanced by the banks. Loans on security of land could not be given as proper documents were not available even in respect of small bits of lands actually possessed by
tribals. Steps have been taken to remove these difficulties but results are yet to be achieved. There is ample scope for legis-
lation and executive action in this regard.

**Resolution 8**

The quantification of outlays from State Plans for tribal areas may be done or reviewed where already done, keeping in view the population, backwardness and the geographical area of the subplan region. The minimum should be the outlay pro-
portionate to the population of the sub-plan areas. This revi-
ew, which has been long overdue, should be done within a month.

Intensive Tribal Development Projects have been ordered to be established in Kerala. But the organizing work itself was delayed abnormally. Even the powers and functions of various levels of officers both technical and administrative are yet to be worked out. If this is not done, progress will be slow as it has been so far. Further legislative and executive action is called for to achieve the purposes aimed at.

**Resolution 9**

An appropriate accounting procedure and methodology for ensuring that sub-plan funds are not diverted for purposes other than those for which they are meant should be evolved as clearly as possible. Creation of separate budget head for the entire sub-plan outlay or sub-heads under each sectoral head could be the possible approaches. The new system should be finalised before September, 1975 so that the progress of expendi-
ture gets reflected in the supplementary budget.

This has been recently ordered, but a major head is not yet given for this, in the state budget at present. There is no chance therefore of the progress of expenditure being reflected in the supplementary budget as there is no separate major head and the accounting is done under the head Harijan Welfare.

**Resolution 10**

A suitable administrative structure for implementation of sub-plan should be finalised urgently. There should be a high-
powered body, preferably a Cabinet Sub-Committee, at the State level, with the responsibility of formulation of Plan frame and giving a general policy direction during its implementation including authority to revise and recast it. The authority for intersectoral reappropriation, if necessary, should also rest with this body. There may be preferably a single line of authority for implementation from the field level to the State level with clear responsibility and adequate delegation of powers at different levels. This chain of command should be responsible for all aspects of development and regulatory functions. The popular participation in decision making and implementation of the plan may be appropriately built in at different levels without, however, allowing to dilute the responsibility of the chain of command in the administrative structure. Such a review should be taken immediately and a decision may be taken in the course of next two months so that effective administrative structure is in position before the first set of I.T.D.Ps. are approved.

There was the usual bureaucratic red tapism at every stage in this matter. It took years to approve the I.T.D.P. idea. Once it was sanctioned, the question of separate sanction for establishing project officers and manning the projects came in. As director of Tribal Welfare of Kerala State it was the bitter experience of this writer that timely and favourable orders were not forthcoming even on urgent or simple matters. It is not surprising that the tribal welfare programme were not getting timely and proper implementation. The apathy and indifference on the part of Government Secretariat is a problem acutely felt by all concerned. But this always escapes effective remedial measures. It is a paradox that once the elected representative occupies the chair of authority in the Secretariat, he too moves in the bureaucratic groove thereby leaving chance for the so called civil servant to safely continue his age old bureaucratic game in everything. Of course there have been exceptions as in the case of flood relief programmes and other crash programmes like housing. But the field of tribal welfare is yet to get the patronage of a sincere approach to meet the needs of the situation as preached by the leaders.

Resolutions

Resolution 11

A system should be devised so that selected officers are posted to the tribal areas. If necessary, the creation of a pool of persons with aptitude for work in tribal areas should be considered.

This is being attempted occasionally and in selected cases especially in the I.T.D.Ps. But positive results are yet to be achieved.

Resolution 12

The transition from the T.D. Block pattern to the new ITDP pattern should be completed within 1975-76 except in Madhya Pradesh where the change-over may be completed by 1976-77.

This could not be done till 1982 in Kerala. Even now there are practical difficulties which can be removed only through strong action at the highest level.

Resolution 13

A suitable system for monitoring and evaluation of programmes may be devised forthwith and the restructuring of the Tribal Research Institutes, wherever necessary, may be completed in the course of next 3 months or so.

Evaluation is taking place on existing schemes and work. The Kerala Institute of Tribal Research and Development, Kozhikode has also done some work. All of them have been able to point out the magnitude and seriousness of the problem of tribals including primitive ones. But welfare and development measures so far adopted have not been adequate for an evaluation statement as there have been failures and hardships in many fields.
RESOLUTION 14

There should be a regular dialogue between the functionaries at the Centre and those in the field through joint visits to the tribal regions.

This is being done occasionally more on a routine nature than for real assessment. More action with dedication is required.

Apart from the items contained in the resolutions the Government of Kerala has been implementing a lot of other welfare and development schemes in the tribal section. Such activities are duly supported by necessary legislative measures and administrative decisions.

Educational concessions are many and all pervading. If a tribal wants to educate his children from the first standard to post graduation and specialised courses, help is available. Similarly if any workable economic welfare and development scheme is brought up for any group of tribals, such scheme can and will be taken up by the Government on the basis of existing rules and orders. Steps are usually taken to introduce new rules and orders whenever found necessary. In the matter of reservation of employment very effective steps have been taken by Government and good results are being produced.

Welfare and development schemes usually adopted by Government include collection and disposal of minor forest produce, running of training-cum-production centres in tailoring, carpentry, weaving and mat-making. Giving industrial training courses and training of apprentices in Cashew Development Corporation, Kerala State Electronic Development Corporation, Punalur Plywood Industries, Government of India Industrial Extension Centre and Kerala Agro Industrial Corporation. Government also sponsor such trained hands for employment under Government owned companies and departments. Kerala Government has undertaken various settlement and development schemes. Such measures include:
1. Intensive Tribal Development Projects in selected tribal localities.

2. Sub-plan Schemes of various departments costing 70% of departmental allocation.

3. *Kodencheri* Scheme.

4. *Attapadi* Scheme.

5. *Pookote* dairy farm.

6. Cardamom plantations.

7. Rubber plantations.

8. Coconut plantations.

9. Rice cultivation.

10. Tapioca plantations.

11. Banana plantations.

Wherever financial assistance over and above the usual government subsidy or grant is seen necessary, it is also being arranged through financial institutions and co-operative societies.\(^7\)

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7. For the year 1983-84 the proposals were:

1. To continue all ongoing schemes and projects.

2. To continue all educational concessions.

3. To give technical training in all departmental training centres and to pay stipend to others in private institutions.

4. To select 15 girijan hamlets and provide all amenities including houses, water supply etc. and facility to enter into agriculture or industry.

5. Loan facilities.

6. Bonded labour to be identified and abolished and such labourers to be settled at Vattachira.

7. Farming societies to be run in Attappadi (Kulukkain and Pattimala) and Kunjome in Wynad.

8. Rubber plantations for 110 families.

9. Coconut plantations for 80 families.


(f. n. contd.)
Compared with other Indian States, Kerala stands foremost in the matter of taking up progressive measures. But the benefits are enjoyed only by a selected few every year depending on funds allotted in the budget. One who makes a round in the tribal localities of Kerala, will not see much progress on a mass scale and one is sure to note the discontentment of large sections of the tribal people. The tribal population of Kerala is only about $2\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs. The number of families may be around 35000. If it has not been possible to develop these 35 thousand

11. Tapioca farm for 60 families.
12. Land to be given along with help to 50 families.
13. Training in brick making, stone cutting etc, to 30 persons.
14. Subsidy upto Rs. 3000 to about 50 persons to start small trade or industry.
15. Subsidy to 30 persons at the rate of Rs. 3000/- for radio electronic trades.
16. Help to 400 families to clear off debts.
17. Distribution of pumpsets.
18. 167 houses to be electrified.
19. Small business loan to 70 persons.
20. To continue 126 Balavadies and GRB hostels.
21. To continue existing mobile dispensary in Trivandrum and to start a new one in Punalur.
22. To run 18 existing ayurvedic dispensaries, 3 allopathic dispensaries and midwifery centres.
23. To dig wells in 100 more places.
24. To expand and improve roads in tribal areas.
25. To implement special schemes for primitive tribes.
26. To give housing grant at the rate of Rs. 4000 to 250 persons.
27. To give thatching grant to 1666 houses at the rate of Rs. 75 each.
28. To conduct benefit oriented medical camps.
29. To complete construction of mini theatre at Chettiampara in Trivandrum.
30. To establish an independent publicity wing.
31. To continue all the integrated tribal development projects.
32. To implement Centrally sponsored schemes and schemes with Central assistance.
families even after 35 years of independence in spite of such varied programmes and announcements, it is certainly a bad and sad reflection. Many things done in the past in the name of tribals have not really reached them due to the legal and administrative lacunae added with the double standard adopted by some of the politicians and exploiters. Basically ignorance and apathy of the tribal people have also contributed to this to a large extent.

As in other parts of India, the tribes in Kerala also were leading a somewhat primitive type of life. Except for Kurichians in Wynad and Kanikars in Trivandrum, none of the tribes had any normal exposure to outside world. They had continued to be in their original stage of food gathering and shifting cultivation. It is also seen that during the initial stages the tribals stood aloof as new developments were beyond their comprehension. Their little contact was with forest and revenue officials and the exploiters. All of them left only bitter memories in the minds of tribal people. The welfare concept was sincerely conveyed to them only recently through elected representatives. The most important weakness of tribals is that there is no political leadership from among themselves. There are no experienced tribal social workers. This gap is usually filled up by members of other communities. Such external leadership has not remained for long in any locality. The tribes do complain that even some of the Harijan leaders have exploited them or at least neglected their cause cruelly. An attempt was made to train a gang of tribal volunteers in each tribal pocket by making them conversant with the Government sponsored schemes and activities so that these volunteers may subsequently work for the benefit of tribes sincerely. This programme is yet to yield results.

**Conclusion**

Legislative measures and executive actions are still wanting in the area of tribal upliftment. Ignorance and apathy on the part of illiterate and indifferent tribals have also been responsible for the present state of affairs.
The non-implementation of the Act of 1975 in the matter of land alienation is sufficient to prove that earnest effort is still wanting in legislative and administrative branches of Government. There is lack of sincerity on the part of the authorities. Even in the matter of eradicating untouchability we are yet to achieve satisfactory progress. Atrocities are committed on tribals and harijans in Cannanore District. All such cases are not result in convictions. The tribals have no political leadership of their own. Leaders of other communities including Harijans who take up their causes are not sincere and dedicated. This situation must change. Let us hope that the legislative measures and executive actions with sincere and dedicated political leadership will bring in an era of better and speedier achievements in the socio economic development of the tribal people in Kerala.