Landless in God's Own Country:

Development and Perpetual Struggles in Kerala

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by

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Abstract

Landless Adivasis (officially categorised as Scheduled Tribes) of the southern Indian province of Kerala face insecure lives and livelihoods despite the presence of apparently generous welfare provisions. Historical curtailment of access to land and contemporary livelihood expulsions have pushed them to demand cultivable land, which is seen by the claimants as representing asset, autonomy, social justice, and identity. Their struggles for land and decent work continue perpetually over generations in spite of several decades of development intervention at the sub-national level. In recent times, the demand for cultivable land has coexisted with the scenario of an agrarian crisis. The thesis explores why the struggles of Kerala's landless Adivasis continue perpetually despite the presence of welfare, and why their demands for cultivable land exist despite the agrarian crisis. It makes three interrelated arguments, pertaining to the position of landless labourers in local growth trajectories, the claims on the state generated by this position, and the state's responses to these claims.

First, the thesis demonstrates that a localised understanding of how landless labourers become "surplus" to capitalist growth trajectories provides a closer picture of their precariousness. Scholarship on relative surplus populations shows their variegated forms, ranging from labourers in constant migration in search of wage work under capitalist relations to people argued as being totally disconnected from the uneven expansion of capitalism. Illustrating seven different sectors from which livelihood expulsions are underway in the lives of landless Adivasis in Kerala, the thesis argues that their position in the local growth trajectory can be understood as an "in-between" one, wherein their wage labour is becoming less and less relevant to the local growth path, although they remain embedded in capitalist relations. Meanwhile, they have been dissuaded from turning into labourers in constant migration by virtue of welfare provisions and political mobilisation. Delving deeper into their expulsion

from one of the livelihood sectors – farming ginger as a cash crop undertaken by their upper-caste neighbours – the thesis demonstrates how the Adivasis' political resistance to oppression contributed to their becoming superfluous from this capitalist enterprise. These discussions provide a clearer picture of why their demands for land for cultivation coexist with the agrarian crisis, as the thesis argues.

Second, the thesis demonstrates that exploring the tension between the land claims made on the state and the state's responses is crucial to understanding the perpetual struggles of the landless. The state in Kerala responds to the land claims through an array of mechanisms related to the provision of land. Departing from the trend of classifying land provision measures in specific countries/regions into neat categories, such as distribution and redistribution, I argue for the consideration of the state's use of myriad permutations of land-related policies, which I collectively call "landfare." Landfare is shown to work in Kerala through the reduction of the complex social problem of landlessness into a target figure for elimination, through the "projectisation" of land distribution, and through the non-distribution of available land. In addition, landfare is combined with the injection of welfare into the Adivasi settlements and resettlement sites. This scenario exhibits a shift from the idea of land provision that transfers social and political control over land to the provision of land and welfare that merely subsidises the cost of reproduction of labour power. The shift perpetuates the struggles of the landless Adivasis even after they receive land.

Third, the thesis demonstrates that the efforts of the state to address land claims can betray the assumptions that it holds about the claimants, a scenario that can result in the land recipients living "state life" – the life envisaged by the state for the claimants – rather than the life they wish to lead. The lens of state life brings out how the state in Kerala manages its Adivasi surplus populations that break out into agitations for land. The assumption that the close relationship Adivasis hold with land will get them out of poverty is rejected by the land

recipients. While the land struggles place a clear demand for cultivable land that provides them with substantive control over the resource, the state's landfare measures are directed at putting out the land struggles. The occasional compromises reached with Adivasi leaders and land recipients' own observation that they feel "disposed of" in the resettlement sites attest to this argument. However, their persistent land struggles make sure that these strategies of the state are exposed and resisted.

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List of Abbreviations

ADS	Area Development Society
AGMS	Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI	Communist Party of India
CSP	Congress Socialist Party
FRA	Forest Rights Act
INC	Indian National Congress
ITDP	Integrated Tribal Development Programme
LDF	Left Democratic Front
LIFE	Livelihood Inclusion and Financial Empowerment
MRS	Model Residential School
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PVTG	Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
RTI	Right to Information
SC	Scheduled Caste
SNDP	Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam
ST	Scheduled Tribe
STDD	Scheduled Tribes Development Department
TEO	Tribal Extension Office
TRDM	Tribal Resettlement and Development Mission
UDF	United Democratic Front

Glossary of Local Terms

1 cent = 0.01 acre = 0.004 hectare

I rupee was roughly £0.01 at the time of fieldwork. Rupees is abbreviated as Rs.

Anganavadi	State-sponsored creche
Coolie	Wage
Grama panchayath	Lowest unit of local government
Grama sabha	Assembly of all adult citizens in a ward
Kaivasharekha	Document indicating possession of land
Oorukoottam	Assembly of all adult Adivasi citizens in a ward
Ward	A sub-unit of the *grama panchayath*, municipality, or municipal corporation

Key Interlocutors

Wayanad

Geetha:	Paniya labourer currently living off NREGA wages. Moved from one colony to another.
Biju:	Young Paniya man who had worked as a ginger labourer. Son of Balan (below).
Balan:	Recipient of land after Muthanga land struggle. Planning to farm cassava
Bhaskaran:	Wayanadan Chetty landlord
Gopi:	Paniya farm labourer sticking on to disappearing work in a landowner's farm
Kunjan:	Paniya labourer now looking for work in the construction sector
Veliyan:	Paniya man relocated from the forests for a tiger reserve
Kunhiraman:	Kuruma farmer and retired Forest Department bureaucrat
Velliyamma:	Balan's mother. Worked as a ginger labourer
Mathai:	Syrian Christian ginger farmer who got rich
Ameer:	Mappila ginger farmer who got moderate profits
Tony:	Syrian Christian banker
Chippan:	Paniya participant of land struggles at Cheengeri, Muthanga, and Thovarimala

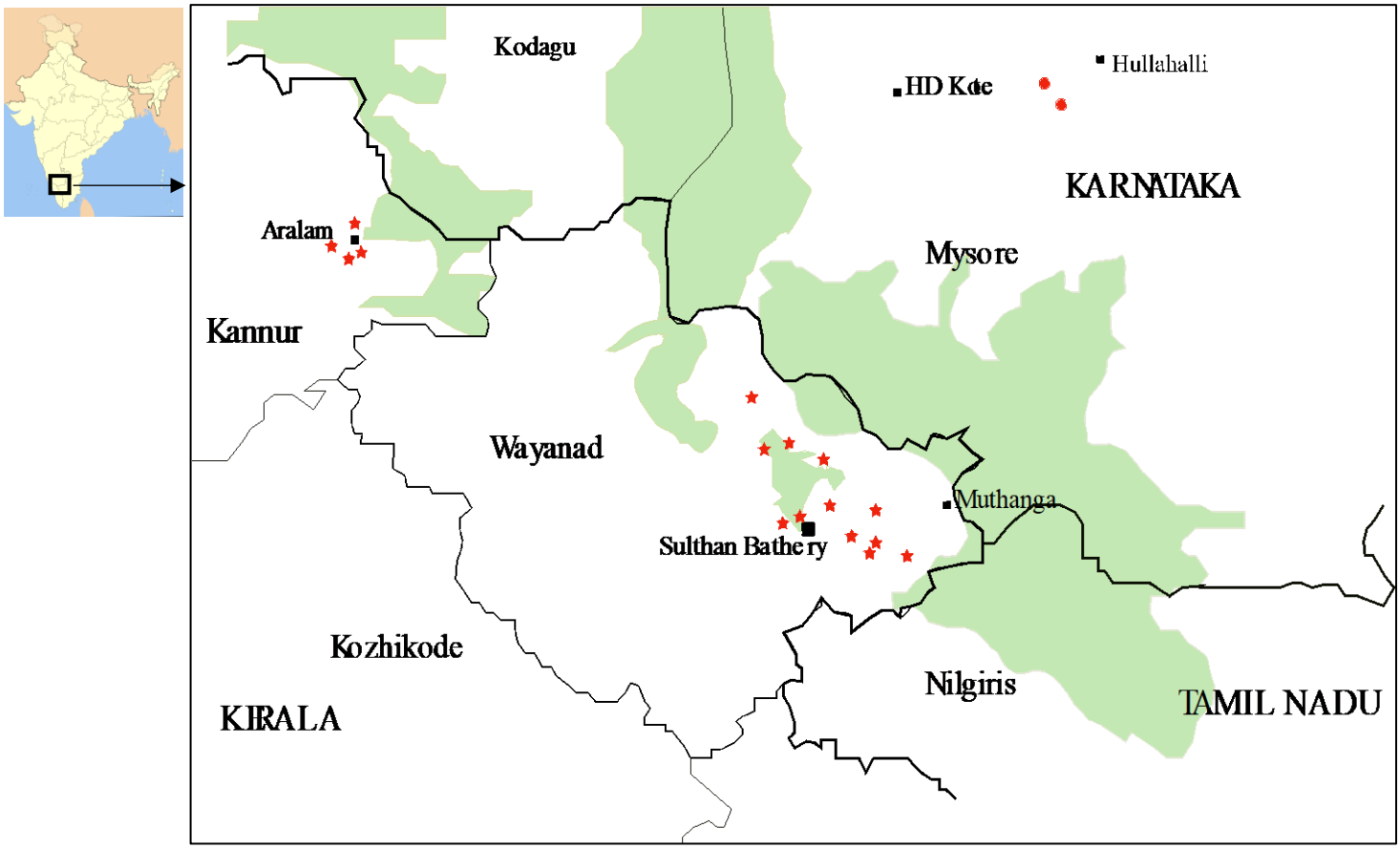
Mysore

Babu:	Syrian Christian ginger farmer
Abraham:	Syrian Christian ginger farmer
Ramesh:	Wadda *mestri*, a representative of a group of labourers
Parvathi:	Lingayat landowner who leased lands to Wayanadan farmers to farm ginger

Aralam

Rajan:	Paniya labourer who has abandoned the land he received
Priya:	Upper-caste bureaucrat in the farm office
Mini:	Paniya recipient of land. Determined to make farming work
Chullikomban:	The elephant that wreaked havoc in Aralam
Sureshan:	Paniya land recipient who is trying, and failing, to make farming work
Kunhikannan:	Recipient of land from the Karimpala community
Rama:	Recipient of land from the Karimpala community
Sindhu:	Works as a tribal promoter. From the Karimpala community
Vijayan:	Paniya land recipient who has now abandoned the land
Shantha:	Paniya land recipient who has now abandoned the land. Participant of the land struggle in Aralam

Field Map



Note: The stars indicate Paniya colonies in Kerala where fieldwork was conducted. The two dots in the Mysore district are the villages where fieldwork was conducted in ginger farms. The shaded area denotes forests.

(Field map by author; not to scale. Map of India by Wikimedia Commons).

1 | Introduction

On a wet morning in 2017, I arrived at the site of a land struggle in Wayanad. Around 15 households belonging to the Paniya Adivasi community had put up tents in a patch of forestland, up on the hills of the Western Ghats in the southern Indian province of Kerala.[1] They had come there after their homes were flooded and were demanding that the state give them the land that was promised to landless Adivasis years ago. Right in front of the tents at the struggle site, a red flag was flying high. It said "AKS," which stood for Adivasi Kshema Samithi ("Adivasi welfare forum"), the Adivasi wing of the ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) (figure 1.1). While I was clicking a photo of it, a participant of the struggle said, "They just came and put it up." The land struggle should not be seen as a challenge to the government.



Figure 1.1: An Adivasi land struggle in Wayanad (left), AKS flag at the site (right). Image by the author.

[1] The subnational political entity of state in India is referred to as "province" in the thesis, while the term "the state" is used to refer to the governing apparatus, theoretical and institutional.

The participants of the struggle were quiet. They were busy preparing food for the day. The smoke rose, cutting through the mist. They were living in a settlement not far from there, so the children shuttled between the struggle site and their homes for kitchen provisions. The settlement was referred to as a "colony," a site where landless Adivasis lived. I had visited the Palakkode colony before. It consisted of around 10 dilapidated, two-room houses stacked next to each other. The colony stood on the edge of a vast stretch of paddy fields beside a canal that brought water for irrigation. Balancing myself on the raised ground along the canal, I had walked towards the colony, expecting few people to be there, away from the sites of the daily wage labour that most Paniyas did. However, they were all at home as there was no work available that day.

The canal irrigated the farms of a Wayanadan Chetty household in the neighbourhood and flooded the colony every year when the monsoon arrived. This time, the colony residents had decided to move to the forest patch overnight as the water rose. Squatting on forestland was prohibited, but Palakkode residents were forced to do so to get an audience from the state. As soon as I sat down at the struggle site, a group of four to five people arrived and asked the participants to leave. I identified one of them. I had met him before; he was a well-known environmentalist. "Adivasis must not encroach upon ecologically sensitive forestland," they said and left. The participants of the struggle stayed quiet.

The struggle went on for two weeks, at the end of which the Member of the Legislative Assembly who represented the area came and asked the participants to end their protest, on the agreed condition that they would be given land. A month later, land was found for them 5km away from their colony on the slope of a hill. The plot was full of rubber trees. The Syrian Christian household that owned the land wanted to sell it off and move out of the remote location, but they would also chop off all the rubber for the wood before they left. Palakkode residents refused this land. No rubber meant no income. Investing in the land afresh was simply

not affordable. Thus, they were back in the colony. When I visited the colony two years later, it was lying flooded again.

The colony was not new to land struggles. In 2003, the residents had participated in a major land struggle in Muthanga, which was only a couple of kilometres away. They had squatted there with hundreds of other landless Adivasis from all over Wayanad until they were driven out by a police ambush, ordered by the Indian National Congress party-led government of the time. In fact, the Paniyas, along with the other landless Adivasi communities in Kerala, have demanded cultivable land since the late 1980s at least, a time when the colonies reported child starvation deaths. The Western Ghats in Kerala can be visualised as a landscape dotted with numerous such land struggles, large and small. Appendix 1 gives an indicative list of some of these struggles, illustrating their persistence.

Situated in Kerala, the Palakkode colony was eligible for numerous welfare programmes from the state, ranging from free food through fair price shops to nearly free education and healthcare. The state had set up "community kitchens" to feed infants, pregnant and lactating women, and the elderly. Kerala's labour laws protected the wages, which were higher than those in the rest of the country. There were schemes to renovate the crumbling homes and improve sanitation. These were in addition to the welfare programmes that were enacted by the central government and implemented by the province such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) that provided public work. Kerala spent around two percent of its annual budget on the Adivasis, who constituted only 1.5 percent of its population (GoK 2019a). Why did Palakkode residents not accept the land, combine it with the welfare provisions, and seek a different life? From the land struggles of the 1980s to the recent occupation of the forest patch, why were they caught up in perpetual struggles? This thesis seeks answers to these questions, enquiring into the local processes that shape these perpetual struggles and keep the Paniyas landless.

As wage labourers, the Paniyas belong to a growing number of labourers around the world whose work status under contemporary capitalist growth trajectories displays increasing uncertainty. The International Labour Organisation estimates around 60 percent of the global working class to be "vulnerably employed," unemployed, or inactive (ILO 2015). The vulnerably employed consist of informal workers and unpaid care workers. The inactive population, although a diverse mix, consists largely of those of the working age who have been pauperised. Even among those who are employed, about 60 percent are at a high risk of being thrown out, ILO notes (*ibid.*). In a grim depiction, Davis (2006) pictures a section of these populations facing precariousness by depicting their mass movement to the cities and search for a home in the slums. Equally starkly, Breman (1994) characterises the labouring population in India that are in constant migratory movements in search for work as "wage hunters and gatherers."

Another section of the global working population, however, has sought to find a way out of the perpetual struggles for survival by demanding land. From the land occupations under the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil and the Zapatistas in Mexico to the numerous scattered land struggles in South and Southeast Asia (see, for instance, Fernandes 2009, Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011, Vergara-Camus 2014, Wolford 2010), these struggles have sought land for disparate, but overlapping, reasons. Land is a means of production, a source of food and fuel, a fall-back option in times of stress. Land is also status, power, social justice, identity, autonomy, territory, and security. Land holds traditions and memories. Demands for land as a means of subsistence have been raised not only in rural parts of the world but also in some urban pockets (Jacobs 2018). As Bernstein (2006) points out, these land struggles are one, if not the only, expression, of the various "agrarian questions of labour" that we encounter in the contemporary world. The importance of land in addressing survival needs and ways of life that people value has been well noted in scholarship (Akram-Lodhi, Borras, and Kay 2007,

El Ghonemy 2009, Ravallion and Sen 1994). Many of the land claims in the developing world, including that of the Paniyas in Kerala, exist despite the trend of deagrarianisation, a term that refers to the move away from smallholder farming as the main or only source of livelihood (Rigg 2006, Rigg, Salamanca, and Thompson 2016).

The backdrop outlined thus far brings up three important questions for examination. First, the *localised* ways in which capitalist growth trajectories shape the nature of precariousness of employment or render some workers unemployed for lengthy periods need precise exploration. In Kerala, political mobilisation and the availability of welfare measures might have placed the Paniyas in a better position than the "wage hunters and gatherers" that Breman followed in Western India, but landlessness and uncertainties in receiving wage work still make them stand at the margins of the local growth trajectory. Even as we acknowledge the importance of the global machinations of capitalism that place labourers in developing countries in extreme precariousness, the specific and local processes through which a set of labourers find themselves caught in perpetual struggles and claims for land merit attention.

Second, while it is beyond interrogation that land is sought because of the diverse meanings that people attach to land, the demands for *cultivable* land in contexts ridden with deagrarianisation need closer inspection. In India, the declining viability of farming is often referred to as an "agrarian crisis." The Paniyas' demands for cultivable land stand in the midst of the agrarian crisis and falling state support for farming, thereby calling for a finer understanding of life *after* receiving land through the land struggles. Third, the various ways in which the state understands and responds to the land claims come up as a pertinent question. As noted in the case of Palakkode colony, efforts to provide welfare measures to landless Adivasis and to find land in response to the land struggles are underway in Kerala. However, state responses do not end these perpetual struggles, bringing up the need for clarity on the

ways in which state responses and peoples' claims interact. This thesis takes up these points for examination.

One of the most common instruments used by states to address the survival needs of their populations is welfare. All over the developing world, states have experimented with a wide variety of welfare measures, ranging from public investments in education and healthcare to cash transfer and microcredit programmes. State-sponsored welfare provides a palliative in contexts that are marked by the compulsion on a labourer to sell her labour power in a competitive market and the dominance of the private sector in the provision of welfare services. This is certainly true in Kerala, where state investments in education, healthcare, poverty eradication, and social security schemes for the labourers have a long history that goes back to precolonial times. Kerala has also performed better than the other provinces in India in implementing the welfare programmes instituted by the central government. These include the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005) that provides 100 days of public work to every rural household, the Forest Rights Act (2006) that recognises the rights of the Adivasis to reside in and withdraw products from forests, and the National Food Security Act (2013) that provides state-subsidised grains to most of the population. Mexico and Brazil, noted above for their land struggles, are known for their large cash transfer programmes Oportunidades (now Prospéra) and Bolsa Familia, respectively.

In contexts where land claims coexist with the provision of welfare, including Kerala, state responses to people's survival struggles will need to be studied by examining the permutations of welfare and land-related measures that the state uses. This examination will need an enquiry into the ways in which the state understands the lives of the claimants in the first place, including their place in the local society and economic trajectory as well as assumptions about their relationship with land.

Addressing the points outlined above, this thesis seeks to make finer sense of the perpetual struggles of the Paniyas. It explores the variegated, localised processes through which livelihood expulsions in capitalist growth trajectories work and place a section of the population in a position of precariousness. Choosing Kerala, a place that is generally known for its better provision of welfare measures in comparison with the other Indian provinces, the thesis explores how the state uses a combination of welfare and land-related instruments at its disposal to manage the land claims of such expelled people. Further, the thesis tries to understand the precise ways in which the state in Kerala understands the Paniyas and their demands while devising projects to respond to their land claims.

Surplus Population

The large number of unemployed and precariously employed people of the world, including the Paniyas, can be said to constitute what Marx (1990[1867], 781) termed the "relative surplus population." The term refers to those people who are superfluous to the immediate needs of capital for wage labour at a particular place and time. Marx argued against Malthus's offensive suggestion that some people were surplus to the availability of resources, and pointed out that it was, in fact, capitalism that made them redundant, *relative* to its needs for wage labour at a particular place and time. He thus produced a powerful lens through which to understand the relationship of labour power to capitalism.

The relative surplus population (hereafter referred to as merely surplus population) exerts downward pressure on the wages of the working population and keeps those who are currently in employment disciplined. The depressed wages aid accumulation. In this way, Marx argued, the existence of the surplus population becomes a requirement for the expansion of capitalism. Capitalist expansion may begin with the employment of a higher number of workers at higher wages but soon renders many of them superfluous by increasing the productivity of labour, and through centralisation and technological innovation. "Accumulation of the capital

is therefore multiplication of the proletariat," Marx noted (*ibid*., p.764). Observing that the generation of the surplus population was specific to the capitalist mode of production, he argued that capitalism kept replenishing this large mass of people out of employment, ready to be called for the exploitation of their labour power. The surplus population is, therefore, a necessary condition for capitalist accumulation:

> But if a surplus labouring population is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus population becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalistic accumulation, indeed it becomes a condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production (*ibid*., p.784).

Marx identified four different categories of the surplus population in the England of his times. The "floating" population went in and out of employment periodically, while the "stagnant" population suffered unemployment for a much longer period of time and lived on very low wages (*ibid*., p.794). The latent population, meanwhile, was the rural population, including agricultural labourers, who were forced to sell their labour in the market as capitalism took hold of the countryside. The agricultural labourers, in particular, lived in such a precarious position that they "stand with one foot already in the swamp of pauperism" (*ibid*., p.796). These three categories served as the reserve army of labour, waiting to be called for work. The paupers, the fourth category, consisted of the old, the infirm, and those who were willing to work but had been pushed to misery by unemployment.

Marx's categories point towards the various experiences of labour positions within the surplus population and the myriad ways in which the surplus population is produced. The concept has seen renewed interest recently, especially since the 2008 financial crisis, in order to understand how workers are rendered redundant in contemporary capitalism (see, for instance, Azeri 2019, Benanav 2019, Ceruti 2010, Habibi and Juliawan 2018, Kabat 2014, Li 2017, McIntyre 2011, Neilson and Stubbs 2011). This scholarship has focused on defining and

measuring the surplus population in the contemporary world, examining the complex and intricate ways in which surplus populations drive today's circuits of capital accumulation, and understanding the specific ways in which workers are made surplus in contemporary capitalism. Highlighting the need for further engagement with the concept of surplus population, Bernards and Soederberg (2021) identify the following areas in which research on the topic can potentially move forward: exploring the "differentiated nature" of surplus populations in time and space; the various ways of exploitation; the interconnections between surplus populations and social reproduction; interactions between the state and the surplus populations; and the new forms of resistance by the surplus populations. This thesis contributes to each of these areas by taking up the case of the Paniyas in Kerala and bringing out the multifarious ways in which Paniya labour is exploited. It explores the links of these modes of exploitation with the agrarian changes underway in the local context, the demands for cultivable land placed by the Paniyas' resistance movements before the state, and the curious role played by this resistance in rendering the Paniyas superfluous from one particular capitalist sector. The thesis further delves into the ways in which the Paniyas navigate the precariousness of their livelihoods and the state's offers of land and welfare (the means through which the state manages the land claims).

In defining and estimating the surplus population in contemporary times, scholars have used the basic constituent elements of unemployment and underemployment, as propounded by Marx. The complexity arises when the large section of what is known as the "informal sector" is brought into the picture. The realm of informality reveals that in many contexts, not being employed is simply not an option, pushing people to work in sectors that are not protected or regulated by the state, especially in the absence of unemployment benefits in these contexts. This includes those in unprotected work and domestic service within the formal sector. Following this idea, Benanav (2014) identifies unemployment, underemployment, and

informal employment as the three categories to measure today's surplus population, and estimates its size to be 87.9 percent of India's workforce and 40 percent of the world's workforce. Neilson and Stubbs (2011) follow the International Labour Organisation's category of the "vulnerably employed" as the measure of the surplus population, noting its limitations: it includes own-account informal workers whose employment position might be quite secure despite being unregulated, and it excludes informal wage labourers. Habibi and Juliawan (2018) follow a more nuanced definition of the surplus population by identifying the formal or informal nature of various job positions within each "main" occupation in the data supplied by the Indonesian state. The informality figure thus obtained is added to the unemployment figures to estimate the size of the surplus population as 58 percent of the country's workforce. Meanwhile, Shah and Lerche (2018, 11) frown at the term surplus population, stating that the problems faced by the people in their field sites in India are "not cyclical unemployment, or partial integration into capitalist production, or pauperisation resulting in surplus population," but the adverse incorporation of the people in capitalism through low wages and poor work conditions. However, adverse incorporation with respect to wages and work conditions was already captured in Marx's original formulation of the surplus population.

These definitional complexities point to the need for a more situated understanding of the variegated surplus populations and identifying their specific features. To outline the precise position of the Paniyas, as agricultural wage labourers who are increasingly looking for non-agricultural wage work but struggling to find it, they are living precarious lives. They go through long periods of unemployment. As will be examined in the empirical chapters, they are facing expulsion from multiple livelihood avenues simultaneously. Their landlessness was the result of centuries of settlement by other communities in Wayanad that curtailed their access to land for cultivation and the forests, dating back to at least the fifteenth century. The precariousness increased with the introduction of private property during colonial rule and

incomplete incorporation into the welfare regime thereafter. It was aggravated later by the liberalisation of the economy. The poor living conditions of their settlements, the colonies, present the starkness of this precariousness in comparison with the standard of living in the rest of Kerala. At the same time, they have not turned into perpetual migrants moving in search of wage work, partly due to their rootedness, the availability of welfare measures, and their participation in land struggles, as noted before. Though in principle they command a daily wage that is relatively high by the Indian standards, thanks to the unionisation of labour in Kerala, they are increasingly being replaced by cheaper migrant labourers from the rest of the country. Thus, the precariousness of the surplus populations needs to be understood in the contexts in which they are produced. The suggestion here is not that global machinations of capitalism do not matter or that the Paniyas are a unique subset of surplus populations. The suggestion, rather, is that a more situated understanding helps explore the myriad and complex ways in which local forms of capitalist growth trajectories produce variegated surplus populations and land claims.

The various ways in which the surplus populations are produced in contemporary capitalism has generated a wide scholarship (see, for instance, Arn 1996, Benanav 2019, Hall 2020, McIntyre 2011). Rather than summarising this rich literature, attention is drawn here to two divergent perspectives that are of importance to the study undertaken in this thesis. The first, following the path of Marx, sees the surplus population as integral to the capitalist system. For instance, Breman's works have amply demonstrated how this works in Western India. Focusing on informal work, Breman points out that many labourers move around from one location to another in search of work in constant circulatory paths (Breman 1994), a condition he describes as being "footloose" (Breman 1996). This includes rural to urban as well as rural to rural migration. This labouring class is subjected to various forms of "neo-bondage" (Breman 2010), the chief form of which is debt. Advance payments to labourers through

middlemen are a ubiquitous example of this practice in India. The "new pauperism" (Breman 2016), for the scholar, involves highly irregular employment and living conditions that are far below any acceptable standard of living. The more vulnerable they are in their place of origin, the more precarious the opportunities they will find in the places of migration (Breman 1996). Breman further draws attention to the "waiting rooms" of labour camps and observes that these populations are not marginal or peripheral, but at the heart of India's "predatory capitalism" (Breman 2019). Thus, for Breman, surplus populations are a part and parcel of the capitalist growth trajectory.

A slightly different reading of contemporary surplus populations is given by Li (2009), who emphasises that capitalism today, dominated by centralised corporations, technological advancement, financialisation, and the service sector, works in such a way that some sections of people do not hold the prospect of finding any employment for a really long time to come. They are not just irregular; they are simply "irrelevant" to capitalism (ibid., p.73). It must be noted that this irrelevance is with respect to the wage labour of the surplus populations; their lands may still be needed. In contrast with Breman's reading of highly irregular work opportunities as an enduring feature of capitalism, Li suggests that some people are simply disconnected from capitalism, given how capital has become far more uneven in its incorporation of certain places and peoples today. "Put crudely, if some portion of the relative surplus population died tomorrow, the rate of profit would remain the same, and the GDP in the affected countries would increase," Li states her argument in stark terms (Li 2017, 1251). Other scholars, too, have noted the total lack of need for certain sections of wage labourers in contemporary capitalism (Ferguson 2015, 11, Sassen 2014, 15).

While Li's analysis inspires an honest assessment of the place of surplus populations in contemporary capitalism, their complete irrelevance might be an early prognosis, considering the diverse ways in which they can still be constitutive of today's capitalism. Power relations,

as Nilsen (2021) reminds us, produce such seeming irrelevance, but there could be many ways in which surplus populations are still linked to local and global trajectories of accumulation. Echoing this point, Bernards and Soederberg (2021) note that even if the wage labour of surplus populations may seem irrelevant to capitalism in the current moment, they may still be indirectly exploited through debt or rent.

This thesis contributes to this discussion by taking the empirical route to study the localised characteristics of the Paniyas as a surplus population. It explores how the Paniyas are currently at an "in-between position," wherein they are facing simultaneous expulsion from multiple livelihood sectors, by virtue of which their wage labour is increasingly becoming less relevant to the capitalist path of growth followed by Kerala. At the same time, they are still connected to circuits of capital through debt, public work, and migration to particular sectors of cash-crop farming. Furthermore, they are not left to perish since they are the targets of welfare programmes. Through its empirical chapters, the thesis argues that this qualified status of becoming less relevant to the local growth path is crucial to understanding why the Paniyas demand land. The "in-between" status of the Paniyas is true not only with respect to those living in the colonies but also those living in sites of resettlement after receiving land from the state. The latter includes sites where projects modelled on cooperative capitalism were set up, ostensibly to provide employment to the land recipients. These empirical investigations are a part of the enquiry into the variegated nature of the surplus populations in particular local contexts. The "in-between" position does *not* mean that the Paniyas are on a path of becoming disconnected from capitalist relations in the future; it is merely a characterisation of their current condition.

The links between the production of surplus populations and social identities, such as gender, race, caste, tribe, and ethnicity, among others, have been well explored in the scholarship (see, for instance, Harriss-White 2003, ILO 2017, Lerche and Shah 2018, Liu 2007,

Prasad 2016, Rajaram 2018, Rao 2018). Caste, as a social structure of stratification that affects around 20 to 25 percent of the world population (Mosse 2018), requires persistent examination for the ways in which it is reproduced in capitalist growth trajectories. Caste interacts with capitalism in myriad ways to aid accumulation in the case of certain groups and restrict accumulation in the case of others. Rural India has seen many strategies through which this works, from gatekeeping of welfare programmes by the elites (Pattenden 2011) to indebtedness (Breman 2010, Guerin, Venkatasubramanian, and Michiels 2018). The impact of market expansion on caste following the liberalisation of the country's economy has been uneven, rather than total dilution, belying any suggestion that economic growth is withering away caste forces (Carswell and De Neve 2014, Guerin, Venkatasubramanian, and Michiels 2018). Systematic discrimination against Dalits and Adivasis have been recorded in the labour market (Carswell, De Neve, and Heyer 2017, Deshpande 2011, Thorat and Newman 2010) and access to capital (Harriss-White et al. 2012, Harriss-White and Heyer 2010, Prakash 2015).

The thesis contributes to this discussion by bringing out a case of how political resistance influences the production of surplus population, a process in which the lived experience of caste is central. In the Kerala context, where the identities of caste, tribe, and religion intersect (Fuller 1976, Miller 1954, Saidalavi 2017), the Paniyas have been marginalised to a "low" position in the stratified society of Wayanad. The Paniyas' resistance to exploitation and oppression by their upper-caste neighbours in a particular sector of agrarian capitalism has led to their becoming redundant from this sector. This aspect is developed later in Chapter 5, where I demonstrate the moments through which the Paniyas, who were employed by the farmers ever since the latter began to invest in speculative farming of ginger as a cash crop in the early 1990s, have been recently perceived as a threat and thus rendered undesirable. The Paniyas are now quickly being replaced. Although the Paniyas' wages were always higher than those of the local labourers in Karnataka, the province neighbouring Kerala

where the ginger farming enterprise is undertaken, their fungibility is a rather recent phenomenon, linked to their rising resistance. The replacement of one community of labourers with another in accordance with wage differentials is a widely observed phenomenon; the effort here is to understand how the politics of resistance plays an additional role in this process.

Welfare and "Landfare"

This section turns to the various ways through which the state responds to the perpetual struggles of surplus populations like the Paniyas. In responding to the survival needs and land claims of the Paniyas, the state in Kerala has used two primary instruments available at its disposal – welfare and land. As indicated before, Adivasi settlements like Palakkode are recipients of numerous welfare programmes. At the same time, the Paniyas have been demanding land since at least the late 1980s, signalling that welfare is not enough. This section investigates this tension between the Paniyas' demands and the state responses and thereby explores the localised ways in which the state manages the land claims of surplus populations.

Welfare is used here to refer to the various social transfer measures adopted by the state, and thus has a more restrictive meaning than when it is used to mean overall wellbeing. As Marshall (1950) pointed out, the idea of "social rights" developed along with capitalism. Welfare measures, as instruments used to realise social rights, can therefore be seen as having evolved along with capitalist markets. While the state could either directly provide welfare measures or make the employers provide them (Titmuss 2018), we are concerned here with the former. Welfare can principally be seen as measures aimed at subsidising the cost of reproduction of labour power (see Gough 1979). In this sense, welfare does the work of preparing the workers for the sale of their labour power through the imparting of skills as well as reducing the cost of preparing the body for the next day's work. From this perspective, welfare works in the service of capital. In addition, welfare performs the additional function of helping maintain the non-working population (*ibid*.). The latter function could be carried out

for various purposes, including the fulfilment of ideological commitments, electoral promises, or the need for social harmony.

The provision of land, if we go by the logic of radical land reforms, aims to provide a means of production as well as a concrete form of social justice (Herring 1983). Such provision of land may lead to a "redistribution of privileges" (Herring 1980). However, while large-scale, radical land reforms may be still underway in some parts of the world, they have faded out of the redistribution agenda in many other contexts like that of Kerala's. This produces the need to understand the variety of ways in which states respond to land claims. Borras and Franco (2010) delineate redistribution, distribution, non-distribution, and reconcentration as four different possibilities of land reforms and classify country-level experiments around the world into one of these categories. In this formulation, while redistribution confiscates land from the landed and attempts to shake up power equations (e.g. China of the 1950s, Cuba of the 1960s), distribution merely provides state-owned land (e.g. forest land allocation in Vietnam), resulting in minimal changes in power relations. Non-distribution involves a state policy of not distributing land (e.g. market-led land reforms in Latin America that benefitted only the elite, effectively redistributing no land), while reconcentration increases the land ownership of the landed (e.g. transfer of land to the elite by the Chilean state after the 1973 coup). The "continuum" approach of land provision, ranging from non-distribution to redistribution, is also adopted by other scholars (Akram-Lodhi, Borras, and Kay 2007, Courville and Patel 2006, 14-15, Teubal 2009, 154-159). While these categories are useful in labelling specific programmes of land provision (or non-provision), the water-tight categories may be of limited help in assessing the larger redistribution "regime" or redistribution "orientation" of the state when it comes to managing land claims of the landless. A regime of land provision can involve a mix of measures, including all the above four modes of providing land, used simultaneously. For instance, responding to the land claims of the Adivasis, the state in Kerala has distributed

pockets of land that the state is willing to let go of, while not distributing plantation lands illegally held by corporate companies. In addition, such a mix of land-related measures might be used along with various welfare measures to address the land claims. This thesis makes a contribution to the discussion on land distribution and welfare by calling for the consideration of the myriad ways in which the state responds to land claims of surplus populations, rather than labelling isolated measures as distribution or redistribution. I use the term "landfare" to capture these myriad ways of state response. Exploring the use of landfare in combination with welfare in state responses to the perpetual struggles of a section of the population claiming land, i.e. the Paniyas, the thesis examines the underlying tension between welfare and landfare.

For Marxian scholars, welfare serves capitalist growth, although the demands for welfare and/or land can be reflective of underlying class conflicts. Meanwhile, a slightly different articulation is provided by Polanyi (1957), who sees such demands as standing in opposition to the expanding market forces. For Polanyi, who was concerned with how the capitalist market came to dominate the society (or in Polanyi's terms, how the market was "disembedded" from the society), there are always countermovements to the expansion of markets. Society is always in a double movement, characterised by the expansion of market forces and countermovements. A useful insight from Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* is that such countermovements can be initiated by the people as well as state actors. The Speenhamland system of late eighteenth-century England, for instance, owed its origins to a group of judges who came together to chalk out a plan to provide relief to poor workers, Polanyi notes. Welfare, from this perspective, can be seen as one of the means of gaining protection from the onslaught of the market. Polanyi recognised that such social protection might not be sufficient to change the very system of market dominance (Dale 2016); nevertheless, it can keep the brazen expansion of the market in check.

Demands for land bring out an additional dimension to the Polanyian analysis. As Goodwin (2016) demonstrates in the case of Ecuador, land struggles by indigenous peoples could be seen as an effort to gain social and political control over land in light of increasing commodification. Commodification, in the Polanyian lens, refers to the conversion of such elements as land, labour, and money into goods governed by the market, although these were originally not meant for such a purpose. Ideal landfare can be interpreted as a redistribution arrangement wherein the state provides land in a way that increases the claimants' social and political control over land. The Paniyas' case is a bit more complicated as their landlessness is a product of gradual loss of control over land and forests spanning centuries and slow transition from precapitalist to capitalist relations. The immediate reason for the eruption of land struggles in the 1980s was the increasing commodification of labour (i.e. the inability to survive other than by selling labour power for wages in the market), especially since liberalisation. The empirical chapters present how, in the case of the Paniyas, the increasing commodification of labour means that cultivable land comes up as the principal demand, despite the falling viability of farming. The thesis contributes to the scholarship on land claims by showing the effect that landfare has had in one particular context. In the case of Kerala, the Paniyas are provided with land mostly to put out their land struggles. This should be read along with the observation in the previous section that the Paniyas represent a section of the surplus population whose (wage) labour is increasingly becoming less relevant to the local growth trajectory. Resettlement projects, then, become sites of "disposing of" these peoples, in my respondents' own words. Landfare at best subsidises the cost of labour reproduction – the aim of welfare – rather than providing a means of production, let alone providing social and political control over land.

There is no delusion here that a larger project of land distribution will take the recipients out of market relations; through debt, rent, and dependence on the markets for inputs, land recipients will still be embedded in market relations. When the Paniyas reject the land they are

offered, as in the case of the Palakkode colony residents, they are firmly and loudly presenting the demand that within the economic relations they are embedded in, they must be provided with land that allows subsistence to the maximum extent possible and substantive social and political control over land.

State Life

To recap, the state can use various combinations of landfare measures, along with welfare, to manage the surplus population, and in the case of those whose wage labour is in the process of becoming increasingly fungible, use such strategies for containing land struggles. The thesis makes a further contribution to the scholarship on the provision of land and welfare to address land claims by demonstrating how such provision mobilises various assumptions about the target population's relationship with land.

In Kerala, while implementing landfare, the state does not merely provide land, dispose of Adivasis, and forget them. Management of this population is a continuous affair, needing the help of an array of mechanisms. This is applicable to the management of the colonies as well as the sites of resettlement. The recipients of land or those left behind in the colonies are left to live a life that the state envisages for them. I call this state-envisaged life "state life." This involves the use of not just land, housing, and welfare programmes, but also the planning of the projects that place the residents in particular relationships with their biophysical environment including crops, plants, and animals, and the micro-level spaces of encounter with the state and sources of livelihood, including wage labour.

Thus, in the case of labourers like the Paniyas whose wage labour increasingly finds no takers, welfare and landfare display a tendency to become instruments of simply "making live" the population (Foucault 2003[1976]), rather than granting control over means of production. Analysing the shift in the nature of the power of the sovereign state in the late eighteenth

century, Foucault characterised this as the shift from the "kill or let live" policies to the "make live or let die" policies. Making live came to dominate the work of the state, realised through the devising of numerous statistical measures to estimate population characteristics. This entailed a parallel shift from the conduct of conduct (that falls within the disciplinary techniques of governmentality) to the process of governing entire populations. Foucault called the latter "biopolitics" (*ibid.*, p.245). It is not a total shift, Foucault points out; the two powers overlap. Biopolitics involves what Foucault calls "control over relations between the human race, or human beings insofar as they are a species, insofar as they are living beings, and their environment, the milieu in which they live" (p.245). Although Foucault outlined the idea of biopolitics, he did not elaborate "when or how biopolitics will be activated" (Li 2009, 66). The state life devised by the state in Kerala helps us understand how a particular form of biopolitics gets activated in response to land claims.

The idea of state life could be fruitfully used to understand how the Paniyas and other landless peoples demanding land are being managed by the state: in Kerala, this takes the form of mobilising an extended arm of the state bureaucracy that is tasked with delivering welfare and land, and making the colonies units of welfare/landfare governance. Showering make-live welfare programmes that cover every stage of the lifecycle and every sector – health, education, food, and housing, among others – and through the piecemeal provision of land, the Paniyas are prevented from perishing.

The concepts of surplus population and state life may belong to different scholarly traditions, but there are important synergies. For instance, calling for the inclusion of an enquiry into the biopolitics of the post-apartheid economic and social citizenship in South Africa in the analysis of the country's land reforms and "jobless deagrarianisation," Du Toit (2018) argues for a syncretic approach that combines Marxian class analysis with Foucauldian biopolitics, despite the divergences between the two traditions. Such an analysis, he points out, will allow

us to consider the interplay between adverse incorporation in economic relations *and* the ways in which citizens are governed as a population through (re)distributive regimes. As "make live" policies expand or transform, the forms of governing target populations, which include governing their economic, social, ecological, and biophysical conditions, will also accordingly expand or transform (Foucault 2008). This lens helps us understand how the Adivasis are understood as a population by the state, including their relationship with land.

While focusing on how the state understands the Paniyas, it would be worthwhile to recall the distinction that Chatterjee (2008) makes between "civil society" and "political society." While the former follows the rules and benefits from institutions of liberal democracy, the latter is forced to break the rules and access services through indirect routes. Critics have fairly questioned the water-tight compartments that Chatterjee proposes (Baviskar and Sundar 2008, Gudavarthy 2012). Without subscribing to the civil society–political society binary, I examine where the struggles of landless Paniyas are placed: while dealing with the state, the Paniyas are constantly traversing the realms of the civil and political societies, often multiple times on a single day. A land struggle, for instance, may encroach on forestland that is accorded the status of absolute, untouchable property of the state by the forest laws. Yet at the same time, the struggle seeks an audience from the liberal state for the acceptance of the demand for land. In Aralam, a land distribution site, the Paniyas who have abandoned their (unproductive) plots hold on to the paper document of the land so that they can pick up cashew fruits seasonally, despite the state deeming such activity illegal. In the responses of the Paniyas, they find it perfectly within their rights to decide where they want to reside and when they want to access land granted to them. Thus, the thesis shows how a more engaged, empirical investigation could be generative in recording complexities, compared to the use of binary analytical categories such as Chatterjee's.

In the case of the landless Adivasis, "state life" is discernible in at least three distinct cases. The first is state control over their relationship with space. The colonies and the resettlement sites become spaces where the relationship between the Adivasis and other elements such as land, forest, the state, and the market become defined. From serving as labour reserves, these spaces have increasingly become spaces that house a section of the surplus population whose wage labour is increasingly becoming less relevant to the local growth path. The colonies and resettlement sites are confined spaces that do not allow free access to the adjoining forests. The term "colony people" often gets attached to the landless Adivasis in Kerala, marking humiliation. The spatial relationship is thus also a relationship of stigmatisation.

The second is the ways through which the entire landless Adivasi population, not just individuals, are brought under governance. The colonies are today a unit of welfare governance, as I witnessed in numerous state documents and interactions with welfare workers. They are governed through the local arms of the Scheduled Tribes Development Department of the Kerala government, stretching from the provincial capital to the colonies. "Tribal promoters," field-level agents of this department hired from among the Adivasis, are allotted a bunch of colonies and resettlement sites to look after. The welfare programmes meant for the renovation of the colonies, and policies that provide housing, rather than land, tend to erase the fact that colonies are sites of historical landlessness. Land granted to the Adivasis is provided with a "certification of holding in hand" the plot, and not full ownership rights.

The third is through the assumptions that the state brings in while planning the resettlement sites. The Adivasi is assumed to have an essentialist relationship with land, and any land provided is assumed to take them out of poverty. The fact that the various meanings of land, which include productivity as well as non-productivity elements, are intricately bound together is not paid enough attention. As Li (2010) mentions in the management of

dispossession of indigenous peoples in Indonesia, assumptions of the "noble savage" permeate through the laws that prohibit the sale of land belonging to indigenous peoples. Assumptions about Adivasis can be seen creeping into the design of land provision programmes as well. For instance, the landless and landed Adivasi communities are not distinguished while the state deploys the broad category of the Scheduled Tribe, thereby erasing the historical, social, economic, and political differences among them. Land is provided in interior forests, where the Paniyas end up in conflicts with wildlife, exposing the state's assumption that the Paniyas, as Adivasis, must effortlessly fit into such a land distribution site.

Perpetual struggles can now be seen as a result of the particular ways in which landfare is actualised by the state to manage surplus populations and the specific ways in which state life is envisaged. These frames are used in the chapters that follow to understand why the Paniyas demand land, and not more welfare, why they demand cultivable land despite an ongoing agrarian crisis, and how their landlessness gets perpetuated despite ongoing measures of land provision.

Field and Methods

Kerala provides a fertile place to conduct the study on the perpetual struggles of people facing precarious lives and demanding land. The very fact that 1.5 percent of this province's population – of Adivasis – continues to be excluded from the benefits of social development that the rest of the province's population have received makes Kerala a suitable place to conduct this study. Although Kerala has provided better living conditions than the other Indian provinces, the study is still important because it helps reveal how contemporary capitalism moves through the gaps in welfare measures and (partial) landfare measures, to proletarianise people.

Wayanad was chosen as the principal field site since this district has seen several Adivasi land struggles. Wayanad also has the highest percentage population of Adivasis (18.5 percent) among all districts in Kerala. Fieldwork was primarily based in a *grama panchayath* (the lowest level of local government) near the Sulthan Bathery town that had a large population of the Paniyas. I also conducted fieldwork in the ginger farms of Karnataka where the Paniya labourers migrated for work, and in the Aralam resettlement site. The former allowed me to understand how the Paniyas were becoming superfluous from a capitalist enterprise. The latter helped explore how landfare and state life functioned in the case of land recipients.

Fieldwork was conducted over 11 months: nine continuous months from June 2017 to February 2018, and additional visits in December 2018 and September 2019. A mix of methods was used. Conversations with the Paniyas, conducted in the colonies, were one of the primary sources of information. The colonies were not "sampled." They became a part of the fieldwork organically while covering the issues followed in this thesis. Many colonies were visited several times, which allowed me to spend extended periods of time there and take down field notes on their spatiality. The multiple visits also allowed me to build trust with my respondents. In fact, in the case of some respondents, receiving consent involved a round or two of rejection, with some respondents opening up to me only after sighting me several times in their colonies or the nearby town. This process of rejection, followed by consent, ensured that the respondents were not assumed to be readily available, in the middle of their wage work or other struggles, to be interviewed by the researcher. The result was rewarding – I could visit the respondents several times, allowing me to capture their stories at length. Thus, consent taking was experienced as a process rather than a one-time ritual of reading out research objectives.

Hanging out in the sites of land struggles enabled me to observe the ways in which land claims were presented before the state and the myriad sizes in which land struggles were

organised, from scattered, short-lived struggles to the larger, more organised ones. I stayed close to the colonies, but residence within the colonies was deemed undesirable as it would have caused inconvenience to the hosts in these space-constrained settlements, and because the history of sexual and other kinds of harassment that the people in the colonies have faced meant that the researcher's residence would have been an added inconvenience. I was also conscious of the colonial baggage that residentially-based observation of Adivasi lives would have carried.

These methods – conversations and hanging out – influenced the data by providing me with memories as well as direct exposure to the land struggles. Free conversations allowed me to capture the many ambiguities, confusions, and emotions laden in the perspectives of my respondents and ensured that these were not erased for the purpose of neat writing (Abu-Lughod 2000). Often younger people joined the conversations, giving me the opportunity to understand their perspectives as well, especially on the topic of the future of farming. The conversations with the elderly brought out reminiscences, taking the engagement beyond the present moment, but these were often devoid of precise dates or timelines. Moreover, the conversations did not provide me with a clear picture of the Paniyas' understanding of the notion of territory, due in part to their centuries-old expulsion from relatively free access to the commons.

The conversations and observations were combined with archival work and compared with my notes from previous fieldwork done five years back to gauge how the Paniyas' struggles were characterised by perpetuity. The fieldwork sought to understand how "large" processes like the production of surplus populations and their negotiations with the state for land occurred in localised forms in small places and thus, the focus was on ordinary people. At the same time, I came to interact with activists from Dalit and Adivasi organisations as the fieldwork progressed. This occurred through participation in the organisation of rallies led by

autonomous (not affiliated to political parties) social movements and regular conversations with the leaders. I use the term "social movement" to refer to organised movements with leaders. Though the term could be expanded to include leaderless, unorganised struggles of the people (which are at the heart of this thesis), I refer to the latter as simply land struggles to help me distinguish them from organised movements such as the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha ("grand assembly of the Adivasis"). Since 2018, working with Adishakthi ("indigenous power"), the student collective of this movement led by Adivasi-Dalit students themselves, has helped me understand how landlessness is related to exclusions from education and how expulsion from livelihood sectors has been intergenerational.

In the colonies, I spoke to ordinary Paniya men and women, roughly in equal numbers. Names of interlocuters have been changed in the thesis, except for well-known activists, bureaucrats, and politicians who are all public figures. The conversations were conducted in Malayalam, the language spoken in the field as well as the author's first language. At home, the Paniyas speak the Paniya language, which is variously described as a dialect of Malayalam or a language in its own right. All my respondents spoke to me in the standard register. Field notes were maintained in Malayalam, which helped capture the language-specific intricacies of meaning. For instance, "*kaivasharekha"* is neither title, nor a Record of Rights (a term often used in relation to documents for Adivasi lands), but a document of "keeping in hand" land.

Interactions with state agents and bureaucrats were largely conducted at the local level, which is where my focus was. This involved hanging out in the lowest level offices of the Scheduled Tribes Development Department (STDD) in Wayanad and Aralam and observing how these offices functioned. Accompanying the tribal promoters, the frontline agents of the department, on their work visits to the colonies allowed me to understand how these agents worked on a day-to-day basis and carried the burden of implementing landfare and welfare on their shoulders.

Walking was explored as a method (Jamil 2016) to understand the land-use changes underway in Wayanad as well as to closely observe the daily work of some of my respondents. For instance, walking with a Kuruma farmer (Kuruma is a landowning Adivasi community) through his paddy farm, I witnessed the pattern of replacement of paddy with areca nut and coconut and the conversion of farmland into real estate; these changes were markers of the slow and stealthy ways in which capital was transforming Wayanad. The transformations had consequences for the Paniyas that were duly noted. During the walk, a group of Paniya labourers were seen singing at a distance. The farmer pointed out that the song was subtly mocking us, the landowning employer and his visitor. This particular vignette brought out how the Paniyas and the Kurumas, both Adivasi communities, inhabited very different life worlds.

My interactions with the higher-level bureaucracy started with the process of seeking permission to conduct fieldwork in the colonies. This journey began with the Integrated Tribal Development Department Project, an arm of the STDD in Wayanad. I was asked to approach the Directorate, the headquarters of the department in the provincial capital. Over here, I was asked to come up with a list of colonies that I wanted to visit along with the dates. I was also asked to submit a list of questions that I would ask my respondents. I was told that there would be field-level checks on me and that I needed to leave the colonies by 5pm. It became increasingly clear that the procedure was not about research ethics, as ethics-related permission should have been provided at the lowest level, where the state was closest to the people. The state was, in fact, conducting surveillance on the colonies for any possible intrusion by Maoist rebels. The Maoists, now organised under the Communist Party of India (Maoist), are a banned group, operating mainly in the forest areas of central India, where a large population of Adivasi communities also live. They have sought to bring autonomy to the Adivasi areas, protesting against the oppression of the people and the mineral extraction in these areas by the elected governments and corporate companies. Though Wayanad has a history of Maoist uprisings that

dates back to the rebellions of the 1970s to free the landless Adiyas (also landless Adivasis) and Paniyas from agricultural bondage, rebel activity has waned over the years. The state in Kerala, however, has always argued that there is a threat of Maoist incursion. Look-out notices with pictures of Maoist rebels were put up all over the district at bus stops, in government offices, and on lamp posts. In Aralam, one of my fieldwork sites in the Kannur district, I was asked to produce the permission letter from the Directorate by a policeman in plainclothes. He patronisingly told me that "Some outsiders were misleading the Adivasis." The policeman belonged to the Thunderbolts, a police wing that hunted down the Maoists. It helped that I spoke the Kannur dialect of Malayalam and had a driving license with an address in the same district so I could be easily located. The whole process revealed how closely the state watched over the lives of its Adivasi population.

The colonial archives in Kozhikode provided information on the administration of Wayanad under the British. The archives of the Mathrubhumi newspaper, yellowing away at its office in Kozhikode city, helped me reconstruct the ginger economy over the years, the matter of Chapter 5. This was a valuable resource as digital news was not available until the middle of the 2000s. The Kerala Legislative Assembly archives provided information regarding land redistribution and welfare schemes. Right to Information (RTI) applications helped access data that were not available in the public domain.

My "upper" caste background was a part and parcel of the conversations with Adivasi respondents. I often brought it up myself by referring to the Nair community's role in bringing feudal land relations to Wayanad as well as the community's political dominance in Kerala. Typical of Kerala, the first questions from most interlocutors (including bureaucrats) would be regarding where my native place was and what my parents did. This helped them place the researcher in Kerala's social milieu and guess my middle-class status. It was quite easy to discuss my caste and class, given their wide use in the public sphere discourses of Kerala. There

was a different sense in which the researcher had to negotiate his position: early in the fieldwork, discussions with Dalit-Adivasi activists and Communist friends often led into moments in which they wondered about the extent to which I personally subscribed to Marxian class politics and identity politics, respectively. The presence of the Communist parties as mainstream powers that periodically ruled the province and their poor record of addressing Adivasi landlessness meant that autonomous Dalit-Adivasi movements were critical not just of the party, but also of class politics. They were dismissive of a class framework that, they argued, used categories such as "peasants" and "labourers" without an understanding of how caste inflected these categories. I was using the Marxian agrarian change scholarship a lot then to understand what Adivasi land claims could mean in a context of agrarian changes. In a similar way, my constant references to Dalit-Adivasi issues, especially in terms of the failure of the left, were often perceived by Communist friends and acquaintances as my subscription to identity politics, seen by the left as a threat to class politics. However, I was never forced to take a stance; I let the discomfort be a productive site of gaining insights.

Chapter Outline

In the following chapters, the thesis presents empirical observations to substantiate its central arguments. The arguments that shape the storyline could be outlined as follows: the Paniyas have been rendered a surplus population through livelihood expulsions that are simultaneous and affect multiple livelihood sectors. This scenario pushes their wage labour into a process of becoming less relevant to the local growth trajectory, a situation that is more desperate than just becoming irregular workers. These expulsions trigger land struggles, despite the uncertain future of farming in a region ridden with agrarian crisis and despite the presence of a welfare state. Delving deeper into one of these expulsions, it is argued that the politics of resistance by the Paniyas and responses to their resistance are an important aspect to be considered in understanding how local processes of generating surplus populations work. The state in Kerala

uses a range of landfare measures, in combination with welfare provisions, to manage the land claims of landless Adivasis. These "make live" policies meant to manage the surplus populations reflect how their cramped settlements are kept in place and how resettlement sites combine the state's assumptions of Adivasi life with unproductive land. The Paniyas are thus made to live a "state life" imagined by the state, at odds with the substantive land redistribution that they seek. Land recipients are forced to abandon the land they receive. The overall consequence is the perpetuation of the Paniyas' struggles.

Chapter 2 outlines the development of the current redistribution regime in Kerala and describes the welfare measures and the land reforms that are said to have contributed to the fairly high social development indicators in this region. The chapter intends to provide a background of welfare in Kerala, against which landfare measures will be juxtaposed in the later chapters. It reviews the literature critiquing Kerala's development trajectory and moves on to take stock of the welfare measures that are targeted at the Adivasis, including an account of the elaborate bureaucratic machinery at work.

Chapter 3 looks into the initial generation of the Paniyas as a surplus population. Taking the settlements of the Paniyas – the colonies – as the object of enquiry, the chapter elaborates the history, spatiality, and lived experience of being surplus and being at the lowest stratum of the caste hierarchy. With the aim of establishing early on in the thesis that resistance is important to my analysis, the chapter goes over some of the key land struggles. The chapter also records the exclusion of the Adivasis from landfare measures which keeps the colonies in place.

Chapter 4 tracks the livelihood expulsions that the Paniyas are facing. Attention is drawn to the slow, stealthy ways in which the expansion of capital in the countryside, rather than any big capital intrusion, expels the Paniyas from their livelihoods. The chapter thereby

demonstrates how Paniya labour is becoming less relevant to the local growth path. The chapter places the land struggles of the Paniyas against the backdrop of the agrarian crisis and explores why claims for cultivable land continue to be raised.

Chapter 5 zooms into one of the livelihood expulsions. Following the rural-to-rural flow of capital and the parallel flow of labour, the chapter tracks the moments through which the expulsion of the Paniyas took place in one particular sector that they migrated to in search of a livelihood. The Paniyas are rapidly being replaced from this sector by local labourers. The chapter shows that the politics around the Paniyas' resistance to their oppression and the responses by their employers are important aspects that contributed to the process of replacement, as much as the lower wages demanded by the local labourers who are replacing the Paniyas.

Chapter 6 shows that although the land struggles seek a means of production over which Adivasis have social and political control, landfare measures of the state work in such a way that they always keep the recipients away from any substantive control over land. To manage these protesting people's land claims, the state uses a number of techniques such as converting landlessness into workable targets, partial distribution of land, and non-distribution of plantation land. Landfare effectively performs the function of welfare as a means of providing temporary protection from the market. Read along with the expansion of welfare measures targeted at Adivasis, these trends present tension between welfare and the idea of substantive redistribution of land.

Chapter 7 dissects the anatomy of one particular land distribution project and shows how the Aralam project – set up in response to land struggles – effectively became a space for "disposing of Adivasis," in respondents' own words. Recipient lives are managed on the resettlement sites through a host of make-live welfare measures. People are forced to abandon

the one-acre plots received, return to their colonies, and sit in further land struggles. The chapter demonstrates how the state imagines a "state life" for the landless Adivasis protesting against the state's landfare measures.

Chapter 8 concludes.

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2 | Redistribution in Kerala

This chapter gives an overview of the redistribution regime that developed in Kerala in order to set the historical background for contextualising the land claims of Adivasis. I first elaborate the universal redistribution programmes that have taken shape over the decades in Kerala before I engage with the welfare measures targeted at the Adivasis. The purpose of the chapter and the thesis is not to serve as a critique of Kerala's social development achievements, on which there is rich literature as reviewed in the paragraphs ahead. Instead, the attempt is to provide a historical trajectory of the growth path followed by Kerala, the specific ways in which welfare and landfare took shape in the province, and the establishment of inclusivity as a key concern. This discussion then prepares the ground for the empirical chapters that demonstrate where the landless Adivasis stand as a surplus population in the local growth trajectory, how the larger processes of capitalist growth are impacting the Adivasis in their quest for livelihoods, and how Adivasi land struggles reveal the tension that unfolds between the state's welfare and landfare measures. The landlessness of the Adivasis has been noted by scholars working on Kerala's development trajectory as a product of historical exclusion from the land reforms (Radhakrishnan 1981, Yadu and Vijayasuryan 2016) and the limitations of the Communist parties' restrictive class framework that is ambivalent to the specific experiences of the landless Adivasi communities (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2015, Steur 2014, 2017). However, this scholarship still has room left for an enquiry into the exact processes through which Adivasis' landlessness and precariousness are being reproduced, the ways in which the state responds to their land claims, and the convergences and divergences between landfare and welfare. This thesis makes a contribution to the literature on Kerala's development studies

by exploring these aspects. As noted in the previous chapter, such an enquiry helps us understand the specific, situated nature of a surplus population and the envisagement of a "state life" by the state for sections of its population erupting in land struggles.

The province of Kerala is tucked away in the southwestern corner of India, between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats. The tourism tagline "God's Own Country" is popularly used while referring to the province's distinct features.[2] The province was formed on 1 November 1956 on the basis of its majority language Malayalam. Until 1949, there were three entities in the region: the Malabar district that was directly ruled by the British colonial government, the Kingdom of Cochin, and the Kingdom of Travancore. The latter two were merged in 1949 and united with Malabar in 1956 to form present-day Kerala. The first provincial elections saw the ascent of a government led by the undivided Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1957; this was one of the earliest Communist governments to win power through elections anywhere in the world.[3] The party split into the CPI and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M) in 1964. Since then, Kerala has been ruled by political coalitions that were led mainly by either the CPI(M) or the Indian National Congress (INC); the coalitions have been known since the 1980s as the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) respectively.

Kerala's development experiences have gained popularity in the academic and development circles since the 1970s. One of the earliest events in this trend was the publication of a report by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs titled "Poverty, Unemployment, and Development Policy: A Case of Selected Issues with Reference to Kerala" (UNDESA 1975). Authored by scholars at the Centre for Development Studies, a public

2 The tagline is attributed to Walter Mendez from an Indian ad agency that was contracted to promote tourism in 1989 (Krishnamurthy 2013, Narayan 2015). Several other places use the same tagline, including Yorkshire in England.

3 Before this, San Marino had a coalition government of Communist parties that came to power in 1945.

research institution based in Kerala's capital city Thiruvananthapuram, the report drew attention to the province's relatively high social and human development indicators that stood out in the developing world, despite the low levels of economic growth in this location. This achievement was reflected in the high literacy rate, low infant and maternal mortality rates, high life expectancy, low fertility rate, and positive sex ratio, alongside a low figure of per capita income.[4] The report highlighted the role played by land reforms and investments in education, health, and other welfare measures in producing these results. Following the publication of the report, Kerala was picked up as a case study of a successful social development experience by a number of scholars who enquired into the factors that contributed to the province's achievements (see, for instance, Desai 1999, Franke and Chasin 1992, Heller 1999, Jeffrey 1992, Ratcliffe 1978, Singh 2015). Public action that placed citizen demands clearly before the state, decentralisation of powers to local governments, and widespread unionisation of labour that resulted in high daily wages were pointed out as additional elements of this development experience. These are elaborated below. Kerala was cited repeatedly in the works of Amartya Sen as an example that demonstrated the argument that economic growth was not a precondition for human development (Drèze and Sen 1989, 1995, 1997, Sen 1999). Terms like "exceptional" (Desai 1999), "puzzle" (Lieten 2002), and "model" (see, for instance, Chathukulam and Tharamangalam 2020, Véron 2001) have been used in the scholarship to describe Kerala's development achievements. This scholarship made Kerala, often alongside Sri Lanka, a popular case study of human development in the developing world. Critics, many of them from within Kerala, have pointed out the shaky foundations and exclusions from the

[4] Jeffrey (1989) reports the development indicators in the 1980s, compiled from various sources, as follows (the national averages in the respective years are given in brackets): literacy in 1981: 70 percent (36), life expectancy in 1985: 66 years (54), infant mortality rate in 1980: 40 per 1,000 live births (112), female to male sex ratio in 1981: 1,032/1,000 (934/1,000), per capita income in 1986-87: Rs.2,371 (Rs.2,974). The current figures are (the national averages are given in brackets): literacy rate: 96 percent (74), life expectancy: 75 years (64), infant mortality rate: seven per 1,000 live births (32), maternal mortality rate: 43 per 100,000 births (113), female to male sex ratio: 951/1,000 (928/1,000) (NFHS 2020).

state's development story all along. The praise for this story and the criticisms for it continue to come out in equal measures in the public sphere of the province and in the scholarship. The next few sections provide a synthesis of this scholarship, with the purpose of noting the various historical trends that contributed towards building the redistribution regime in Kerala. Rather than providing a chronological account, these trends are outlined here around the key themes of land reforms, labour, welfare, and public action.

I begin in the post-independence period and describe how the land reforms marked one of the earliest redistributive steps taken by the left in the province. I go on to describe how the reforms combined with a number of other overlapping historical trends such as the development of the non-agricultural sectors and emigration to the Middle East to shape the capitalist growth path that took root in the province. The next section elaborates how the mobilisation of labour, mainly by the left, has been noted in the scholarship as a central feature of the province's development story. This section also takes stock of the welfare transfers. Public action and decentralisation of power and their critiques are reviewed in the following section. The chapter then takes a short detour to the precolonial times to understand the historical roots of the welfare and landfare regimes of today's Kerala, highlighting the roles of the princely states, the missionaries, and the social reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in laying the foundations of the redistribution regime in the province. The section that follows is dedicated to the welfare state as it manifests in the lives of the Adivasis. The final section concludes.

Land Reforms and Growth Path

Kerala has been hailed as a place that "pursued what is arguably the most successful strategy of redistributive development outside the socialist world" (Heller 1999, 6-7) and as one of four social democracies in the global South (Sandbrook et al. 2007). Land reforms, first legislated in 1957 and implemented in 1970 after several changes in the original legislation, were one of

the earliest redistributive measures in the postcolonial times that attracted such attention to this thin strip of land. The land reforms have been hailed as a "redistribution of privileges" (Herring 1980). The reforms had three main elements: abolition of tenancies and conferral of ownership rights to tenants, redistribution of land above maximum limits set by the state, and provision of housing plots of 10 cents to each agricultural labourer household (a cent is a hundredth of an acre, roughly the size of 1/175th of a football ground). The land reforms, although originally a part of the agenda of the Indian National Congress party in the anti-colonial struggle at the national level, were taken up as a key point of contestation by the left in Kerala in its work of mobilising agricultural labourers, tenants, and factory workers into its fold. The land reforms have been argued to have brought about significant transfer of assets, which in turn, led to a rise in the standard of life (Ramakumar 2006). This is most visible today in the widespread presence of free-standing houses with their own plots across the province.

Meanwhile, critics have pointed out several limitations of the reforms. The large plantation sector, set up by the British and passed on to Indian corporate companies, was excluded from the purview of the land reforms (Raj 2013, Ravi Raman 2010). The long gap between the first land reform legislation and its implementation allowed many large landowners to transfer property to their kith and kin (Herring 1991). The gender dimension of land ownership was not given consideration in the reforms (Kodoth 2001). Most significantly, the limited distribution of housing plots to the agricultural labourers, including the Dalits and the Adivasis, led to their exclusion (Radhakrishnan 1980, 1981, Scaria 2010).

The land reforms are said to have unleashed capitalist forces in agriculture (Dasgupta 2017). Capitalist relations were already firming up during the colonial rule, especially through the plantations, but the land reforms marked the complete end of feudal relations. Economic growth was, however, stagnant for nearly three decades, earning the province the disrepute of being a place unsuitable for investment (Kannan 1988). This trend changed in 1987 when

Kerala started to record positive growth, further catalysed by the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s. By 1999, the province witnessed a sectoral change with respect to employment: agriculture now employed fewer people than the secondary and tertiary sectors (Kannan 2005). The tertiary sector was largely fuelled by banking, tourism, and more recently, information technology. This growth, however, has been accompanied by high levels of unemployment that have stayed above the national average for many decades. The overall feature of this scenario is the unemployment of the educated, caused by a rise in the levels of education and preferences moving away from lower-paid jobs. A parallel trend has been the falling viability of farming, triggered by a number of factors such as a rise in the cost of inputs, high wages, and preferences moving away from farming (these are elaborated in Chapter 4). This trend has meant a fall in the number of employment days available to the agricultural labourers, including the landless Adivasis.

A major factor that fuelled the turnaround of the economy from low to high growth was remittances. Kerala has seen a steady trend of emigration to the oil-producing countries of the Middle East since the 1970s, attracted by the demand for employment that was fuelled by the expansion of the oil industry there (Zachariah and Irudaya Rajan 2012). Remittances shored up household incomes, driving up consumption demand, in turn boosting the construction and service sectors. Balakrishnan (1999) argues that more than the fragmentation of land caused by the land reforms, the remittances from the Middle East might have been responsible for the increase in pressure on land for real estate, contributing to the strain on land available to support farming. At its peak, remittance figures stood at 21 percent of the Net State Domestic Product (NSDP). Between 1980 and 2012, the rate of growth of remittances was greater than that of the NSDP (Kannan and Hari 2020). From the more manual, lower-paid jobs of the earlier times, the emigrant population has now moved on to establish themselves in higher-paid employment in the host countries. The crucial point to note here is that emigration was, to a large extent,

closely linked to community-based networks. The Paniyas and other landless Adivasi communities were hardly ever integrated into these networks, keeping them outside this route of social mobility.

The land reforms and the remittances can be said to have contributed to the rise of a large middle class in the province. Mannathukkaren (2010a) calls the consumption culture that took root in the province an important "structural change" in the growth path of the province. Lukose (2005) notes that this consumption culture is most notable in the rapid rise of private and state-aided (but privately owned) colleges across the province. This has led to the transformation of the once lively public education sector, a trend that is comparable with the rise of private education in the rest of the country. Further, the subsidisation of the cost of reproducing labour power, made possible by the welfare transfers from the state and social services, allowed savings that further drove up consumption. Chua (2016) links the rise of suicides in the province to middle-class anxieties about upward mobility, driven by the province's consumption culture.

The takeaway from the foregoing discussion is the larger character of the economy and society in Kerala: social mobility has been made possible through multiple historical trends that shaped the province's development pathway for a large section of the population. However, the landless Adivasis have stayed at the margins of these trends.

Over the past decade, migrant workers from the other provinces of India have taken over most of the daily wage work. This has happened most significantly in the construction sector, but increasingly also in other forms of wage work, including farming and the service sector. Estimated currently at about three million, the workers are comprised of circular migrants, largely from the eastern provinces of West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand, and Assam (Nidheesh 2018). The migrant workers, now officially referred to as "guest workers" by the

Kerala government, do not have participation in the labour unions and therefore have limited bargaining power (Prasad-Aleyamma 2017). Their wages are at least Rs.100-200 lower than that of Kerala's workers. However, the wages are still far higher than those in their home provinces, making the trend of migration steady over the years, with districts in Kerala linked to specific districts in the host provinces through worker networks (Peter, Sanghvi, and Narendran 2020). The provincial government has, meanwhile, instituted specific welfare measures for the migrant workers as well. For instance, the Interstate Migrant Welfare Fund and the Aawaz Insurance Scheme ("*aawaz*" means voice in Hindi/Urdu) take care of their housing and insurance against employment risks. The local daily wage workers, such as the landless Paniya Adivasis, are increasingly being replaced by the migrant workers, a subject that the thesis will return to in the chapters ahead.

Meanwhile, land has become a contested resource between the state and the citizens. These protests have been taken up by not just the landless communities, but also by middle-class citizens belonging to non-Dalit, non-Adivasi castes, and range from struggles against road highway expansion and construction of gas pipelines to the construction of a port. The rapid conversion of paddy lands and the destruction of mangroves for construction purposes prompted a previous CPI(M)-led government to bring out the Kerala Paddy Land and Wetland Conservation Act in 2008, prohibiting all conversion, including in private property. The law envisaged the formation of citizen groups under the local governments to take up farming in the plots of those landowners who did not wish to take up farming, by giving a share of the produce to the landowner. The law could have benefitted communities like the Paniyas whose traditional skills lie in paddy farming. However, the law was diluted in several stages by the UDF and the LDF governments that came afterwards, allowing largescale conversions. The contestations around land and the dilution of the 2008 law give a hint of Kerala slowly yielding to (neoliberal) market forces.

Labour and Welfare

The land reforms of the 1970s were accompanied by a number of welfare measures, many of them a first in the whole country. For instance, in 1974, the CPI-led government brought out a law that ensured employment security to agricultural labourers, a first in the country (Ratcliffe 1978). This also contained provisions for better working conditions and pension funds. Similarly, wage labourers outside agriculture and industries have been the beneficiaries of social transfers, which are managed by "welfare boards" set up with their own elaborate bureaucratic machinery. In parallel, investments in universal public education and healthcare increased immensely in the early decades following the formation of the province, leading to vast improvements in literacy levels and health indicators.

The left, and to a limited extent the Indian National Congress, were instrumental in organising labour. The extensive unionisation of agricultural and industrial labour by the left is pointed out in the scholarship as a core aspect of Kerala's development experience (Kurien 1995). Workers in key agro-industrial sectors, ranging from toddy tappers, cashew workers, and *beedi* (Indian cigarette) workers to coir workers, were able to unionise and demand high wages in the early decades after the formation of the province. Although opposition of the unions in the early years to mechanisation posed a challenge before economic growth, this opposition bolstered labour's bargaining power against capital. The overall effect was the production of a public that placed clear demands before the state. This, in turn, led to the expansion of social services provided by the state in food, health, education, and housing.

For Herring (1983), the work of the left parties, especially the unionisation of labour, created a "public moral economy" that placed labour above profits. Heller (1999) strongly believes that it was neither the markets nor the "bourgeoisie" that steered Kerala's development achievements; these were the result of the mobilisation of the "subordinate" classes, resulting in a "robust" form of "social democratic capitalism". The land reforms helped inaugurate this

path, but the journey was sustained through the consistent mobilisation of labour. This did lead to stagnation in the economy, a "crisis of capitalist accumulation," as Heller puts it (*ibid.*, p.2). However, this was turned around when the institutionalisation of the class conflict through state intervention fuelled economic growth (by 1987), without compromising on the gains made in the social sector. The work of the unions, the mediation by the state, and labour's bargains with capital led to the "institutionalisation of democracy" in Kerala, Heller argues (*ibid.*). In addition, the periodic electoral victory of the left parties and the adversarial politics of lower-class mobilisation led to significant expansion of welfare measures. Welfare measures have led to the creation of human capital required for capitalist growth, rather than inhibiting it. Thus, both capitalism and democracy have been the beneficiaries of the inclusion of labour, in Heller's view. He calls the mobilisation of labour the second most important agrarian transition in the province, after the transition from precapitalist to capitalist relations through the changes brought about in property relations by the land reforms. This was a transition "within capitalism" that made possible a more "mediated but still contested" form of relationship between labour and capital (*ibid.*).

While sympathetic to the province's achievements in social development, Mannathukkaren (2010a) criticises those narratives that try to paint Kerala as a social democracy. He argues that such narratives reek of modernisation, wherein the ideal welfare state assumed is that of Scandinavian models of combining capitalism with social transfers – models that the developing world is expected to catch up to. This erases the possibility of the developing world travelling on its own paths of development and coming up with its own experiences of welfare states, he points out. Mannathukkaren chooses to characterise the welfare state in Kerala as "late socialism," distinguishing it from social democracy, characterised by "contradictions and paradoxes" that reveal a continuous tension between socialist and capitalist ideals, rather than a neat settlement between the two resulting in an

equilibrium condition. The term "late socialism" is borrowed from the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak, who used it to characterise the last three decades of the Soviet Union. The suitability of the term apart, Mannathukkaren's emphasis on the need to understand the ongoing tensions between the capitalist growth path and the egalitarian ideals is significant, especially given the impacts of privatisation of education and healthcare after the liberalisation of the Indian economy (George 1993, Oommen 2010). The gains by labour, especially in the field of agriculture, were dealt a severe blow by liberalisation (Sharma 2006).

Thus, it can be seen that two trends were simultaneously underway in Kerala, reminiscent of Polanyi's (1957) double movement. The land reforms as well as state-mediated negotiations between capital and labour allowed the expansion of markets and the commodification of land and labour. Liberalisation continues to carry this trend forward. In the other direction, the mobilisation of labour, as well as state action in expanding welfare, served as a countermovement that made sure that capital was not allowed to squeeze labour unchecked. A fallout of the state's mediation between capital and labour and its welfare action was that it became the definitive platform before which redistributive demands were placed by the public.

The Paniyas and the other landless Adivasi communities, as agricultural labourers, can be said to have benefitted in general from being members of this society that allowed them to gain access to the unions and the welfare measures, and in principle, to command a high daily wage (rural daily wage stood at around Rs.700 per day for men and Rs.500 per day for women at the time of fieldwork, against a national average of Rs.270). The mainstream society considers the Adivasis as simply lacking the social capital and political resources to partake in the achievements of the "model" (Devika 2013). Their inability to improve their living conditions is explained in the Kerala "model" scholarship as an "outlier" effect (Kurien 1995). As Steur (2009, 25) notes, this interpretation does not pay attention to the "present limitations

of neoliberalism on initiatives for the emancipation of subaltern groups," by which the author means the inability of Kerala's welfare net to withstand the onslaught of the neoliberal market. As the empirical chapters will demonstrate, the high growth – high welfare path now followed by Kerala is simultaneously pushing the landless Adivasis out of their livelihoods at the same time as governing this population as the target of a host of welfare measures. Unlike Steur, however, this thesis gives equal importance to the slow processes that resulted in the Paniyas' dispossession and the role played by landfare measures preceding liberalisation.

Public Action

Public action and a strong civil society have been hailed as two of the important constituents of the Kerala development experience; these are constituents that have worked towards maintaining the demands made by the citizens on the state and thereby sustaining the welfare transfers. The various associational groups, ranging from trade unions, educational associations, environmental groups, women's groups, religious charities, cooperatives, and library movements to political parties, are said to have made this civil society a highly politicised one (Törnquist 2002). Public action is argued to have led to the impressive development achievements of the province when contrasted with those of a province like West Bengal that too had many decades of left rule (Drèze and Sen 1989, Oommen 2000). Heller (1999) finds Kerala to be an example of "deepening democracy," where, in contrast with the rest of India, democratic practices influenced all aspects of public life in such a manner that they shaped the relations not just between the state and the citizens, but also among the citizens.

A concrete form in which public action manifested, giving a new trajectory to the development experiments of Kerala, was the decentralisation of power that led to large-scale transfers of welfare-related decision-making powers as well as funds to elected local governments. The context can be found in the late 1980s, when, like elsewhere in the developing world, reducing the burden of responsibilities on governments became one of the

requirements of the Structural Adjustment Programmes. In India, transferring development decisions to a three-tier system of local governance was proposed, under which people would come together to articulate their demands and elect their representatives to local governments. Kerala witnessed a particular process through which this was implemented. Under the aegis of the left and the leadership of the Kerala Shastra Sahithya Parishad ("Kerala people's science movement"), a left-leaning organisation aimed at promoting scientific thinking in public life, the process of devolution of powers was taken up as a province-wide movement called the People's Planning Campaign in 1996 (Thomas Isaac and Franke 2000). The campaign involved marches along the length of the province to popularise people's participation in local governance and training of elected representatives and state functionaries at the local level in various aspects of governance. The popularity of the campaign helped entrench in society the newly elected local governance system that remains an active part of the everyday lives of the people in the province. In rural areas, the system consists of the lowest tier of the *grama panchayaths* ("village councils") and the higher tiers of the *block panchayaths* and the *district panchayaths*. Each *grama panchayath* is divided into "wards" that elect representatives called the members. The small towns similarly elect the municipalities and the big towns the municipal corporations; both of these are also divided into wards. The planning process starts with the adult residents of a ward coming together in a *grama sabha* ("village assembly") or ward meeting to articulate their development needs. These are consolidated at the higher levels, before being passed on to the provincial government for financial devolution. In areas with substantial Adivasi presence, such as Wayanad, the state constitutes parallel assemblies of Adivasi adult residents in each ward; these are called the *oorukoottams* ("village meetings") and are meant to incorporate the special demands and concerns of the Adivasi citizens in the decentralised development planning process. More recently, 50 percent of all elected seats in the local governments have been reserved for women, resulting in a sudden influx of women

representatives, although this has not translated to any significant increase in the Legislative Assembly of the province.

Scholars from across the world have applauded the decentralisation process (Harriss 2001, Heller, Harilal, and Chaudhuri 2007). The Peoples' Planning Campaign is pointed out by Franke and Chasin (1997) as an example of Kerala's preparedness to challenge the forces of globalisation. Calling Kerala's decentralisation programme as "probably the largest" (*ibid.*, p.3061) in the developing world, they argue that the articulation of welfare demands by people at the lowest level paves the way for a finer understanding of the impacts of globalisation on people's lives and of strategies to resist the impacts at that level.

The local governments are important to understand the redistribution regime in Kerala, as a host of welfare programmes are implemented through these bodies. Apart from the welfare programmes of the provincial government, the local governments also identify the beneficiaries and distribute the benefits of several schemes of the central government. For instance, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) of 2005, instituted by the central government, is implemented through the local governments. Despite the NREGA wages (Rs.263 per day in Wayanad at the time of fieldwork), largely determined by the central government, being far lower than the daily wages in Kerala, the law has provided an important safety net for many Paniya households that struggle to find other means of livelihood. In the case of some Paniya households, the NREGA was mentioned as the only source of livelihood during my fieldwork interviews.

Mannathukkaren (2010b) makes a measured assessment of the devolution of powers by arguing that the People's Planning Campaign was a point in time that laid the foundation of "new forms of political sociability" that were "anchored in older forms of community" (p.301). Other critics have explicitly pointed out that the decentralisation process is only seemingly

participatory since it continues the older practices beneath the surface (Törnquist 2007). The "older forms of community" can be interpreted as the older caste and gender relations that were not seriously challenged by the decentralisation process. This is certainly true in the case of the Adivasi *oorukoottams*, which rather than drawing on traditional assemblies of Adivasi communities, constitute a governmentalised process of inviting all communities belonging to the Scheduled Tribe category in one gathering, presided over by the *grama panchayath* representatives who most often belong to upper castes. There is little registration of Adivasi voices, especially the differing concerns of the various Adivasi communities (Münster and Vishnudas 2012, Sudheesh 2013).

Devika (2016b) argues that decentralisation was a move adopted by the left in response to the rise of a wide range of peoples' movements that seemed to challenge the hegemony of the left in the province. The 1980s was a time when a large number of autonomous people's movements, including Dalit and Adivasi land struggles, environmental movements, and feminist mobilisation, among others, were either taking shape or becoming formidable forces in the province's public sphere. These movements highlighted the marginalised status of their respective constituencies in the development experience of Kerala and pitched these groups' concerns as an attack on the "Kerala model" that the left had vocally taken credit for. In addition, these movements emerged as a threat to the work taken up by the left in the mobilisation of various classes in the past four decades, a work that the left had for long considered its forte. Decentralisation of power as a means of bringing people back into the left's fold through the trope of "participation" was thus seen as a sagacious move to retain hegemony.

This argument is especially significant to the case of the organised Adivasi land struggles led by autonomous social movements. The left's opposition to these movements was visible in the case of the Adivasi land struggles that began to erupt in the late 1980s. Seen from

this lens, it was not only an ideological clash between the class framework of the left and the land struggle narratives that highlighted the specific oppressions based on Adivasi identity (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2015, Steur 2017) but also a struggle with a political hegemon unwilling to yield space to autonomous movements that challenged it. The left considered itself the representative of all marginalised people and their concerns. In the case of the Adivasis, this was accomplished through the formation of the feeder organisation Adivasi Kshema Samithi ("Adivasi welfare forum") in the year 2000, arguably in response to the autonomous land struggles that the Adivasis were organising from the late 1980s onwards.

A crucial step in expanding the hegemony of the left in the public sphere was the setting up of the Kudumbashree ("family prosperity"), the name given to the poverty eradication mission of the provincial government, in 1998. The main feature of the Kudumbashree was the formation of a large network of women, who were organised in a three-tier structure of "neighbourhoods," "areas," and "communities," with the aim of "empowerment" (Christabell 2013, Devika 2016a). Working along with the *grama panchayaths*, the Kudumbashree units have formed micro-savings groups, and many of them have started enterprises. Most importantly, the Kudumbashree has been assigned the role of the implementing agency with respect to the NREGA, making women the majority of participants in public work. The Kudumbashree networks have been the channels through which many women have entered mainstream politics, especially in the local governments. Crucially, several studies have noted the exclusion of women from landless Adivasi communities like the Paniyas from this programme (Arun, Arun, and Devi 2011, Williams et al. 2011). In Chapter 7, we will witness a vignette wherein Paniya women are being accused by their fellow Kudumbashree members as being unconcerned about the need to build savings through the programme and their unsuitability for the programme's micro-savings scheme.

Roots of Welfare and Landfare

As must be evident from the foregoing discussion, the left has been highlighted in the scholarship as being instrumental in shaping the development experience of Kerala, despite alternating in power with the other main coalition, the Indian National Congress-led United Democratic Front. Franke and Chasin (1989) call the steps taken by the left, primarily with respect to the land reforms, unionisation, and welfare measures as "radical" reforms. Based on their case study of the impacts of the reforms in a village in Kerala, the authors conclude that popular movements and "militant" progressive organisations that have strong leaders, as in Kerala's left, are important for starting and sustaining reforms. Desai (2005, 458) points to the role of the left and says that the left emerged from the "imbrications of lower caste, working class, anticolonial, and tenants' movements" and led "parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggles," to end feudal relations at the same time as expanding the social security system. The left was able to form the hegemony they could in Kerala, and could not in West Bengal, because it emerged in Kerala from the grassroots in the form of the provincial unit of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), an offshoot of the Indian National Congress, during the anti-colonial struggle (Desai 2007). The CSP took up the cause of labour and did the groundwork of mobilising supporters, laying the foundation for the left's rise as an electoral power (Desai 1999).

Menon (1994), meanwhile, draws attention to the role of caste and matriliny in contributing to the rise of the Communists. Matriliny was followed mostly by the Nairs, an umbrella caste of several subcastes (Fuller 1975), and a few other communities, including many Muslim families, until the early twentieth century. It considered all children as belonging to the mother's household. The women entered relatively "free" sexual relationships with men from the Nair or Brahmin castes, but these men were not considered members of the household (Saradamoni 1999). The family property was an indivisible corporation, passed on along the

mother's lineage. Men, in effect, were given the responsibility of their sister's children in the household they were born in. These features earned the system the name *marumakkathayam* ("inheritance to sister's children"). This is a generic characterisation of the system; there were large variations between various regions of Kerala and incremental changes that occurred over the precolonial and colonial times (Arunima 1996). In the twentieth century, the matrilineal system declined. Early twentieth-century legislation in the princely state of Travancore began the trend of allowing the partition of property. A series of legislation in the three regions – Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar – led to the weakening, and eventual collapse, of the system. Many of the prominent early Communist leaders came up from these crumbling Nair homes with fathers who were socially irrelevant, a scenario that plunged them into a crisis of masculinity against the backdrop of an influx of new moral values around fatherhood, made available through colonial powers and the missionaries (Menon 1994). The Communist movement, Menon argues, provided an outlet of power and expression to these insecure masculinities. The point to note from this discussion is that these early Nair Communist leaders were themselves a product of the sociological changes in Kerala, and that the experience of caste was intrinsic to the formation of the left in the province.

Scholars have simultaneously sought to trace the history of development achievements of Kerala in the precolonial period, preceding the emergence of the left as a hegemonic power. Gita Sen (1992), for instance, points out that the relative autonomy of the princely states, along with the relative autonomy that matrilineal women enjoyed, and the anti-caste struggles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century led to the "democratisation" of society. Desai (2005) notes that the Travancore and the Cochin kingdoms initiated welfare measures to ward off annexation by the British. The welfare measures also aimed to stave off unrest in society as well as competition from the missionaries for popularity. The welfare measures of Travancore included conferral of ownership to the tenants, transfer of state-owned land to the tenants,

declaration of universal education that granted access to schools to all castes, royal declarations that opened temples to all castes, and investments in public healthcare, among others. Early on, a Travancore royal proclamation of 1817 had declared that the state would bear the entire cost of its population's education, and another in 1865 had conferred full ownership rights to tenants over 81,000 hectares of state-owned land – initiatives that were made possible by revenue coming in from the export of coir and plantation products (Jeffrey 1992). The princely state of Cochin adopted similar, though less ambitious, measures. Landfare and welfare, thus, have a long history in Kerala, preceding the rise of the left.

While other princely states of colonial India, such as Baroda and Mysore, also tried to undertake welfare measures, their efforts were dwarfed by those of Travancore and Cochin (Desai 2005). The welfare measures were a "conscious effort" at "streamlining wasteful financial practices," "stimulating economic productivity," and "avoiding political turmoil," as all these could have become reasons for annexation by the British (i*bid.*, p.460). Indirect rule by the British was thus maintained. Market relations expanded and inserted the regional economy into the world economy. This extended to the agricultural sector, where the land reforms resulted in "a peculiar kind of dependent capitalism in Travancore" (*ibid.*, p.460) that led to the peasants becoming integrated into capitalist relations, including global value chains. Travancore saw many changes as a result: challenges to power from the landlords were warded off, literacy increased, and a large working class was created in the farms and factories and in the plantations established by the colonial government (Kawashima 2000).

Meanwhile, the protestant missionaries that had arrived at various points during the colonial rule were active in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar in setting up schools and hospitals and winning converts. Noting that the missionaries had employed the tropes of *praapthi* ("ability") and *pathratha* ("capacity") in their work (focused on the untouchable castes of the time), Devika (2010) points out that the idea of capability building as an element

of progress has a long history in the province and was not solely borrowed from the recent development discourse. A few Adivasi communities like the Malayarayas of central Kerala were widely converted; they have seen a significant rise in educational levels and more recently, a large presence in the reserved seats for Scheduled Tribes in public employment. The Adivasis of Wayanad largely stayed out of the purview of the missionaries' influence in colonial times. Yet the contribution of the missionaries has been significant in shaping inclusivity as a key constituent of the development discourse in Kerala.

Though significant landfare and welfare measures were taken up by the two princely states, partly aimed at preventing social unrest, these did not prevent the eruption of anti-caste struggles. The social reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries further shaped the course of the redistribution regime in the province. Similar movements were underway throughout the country during this period; I focus here on the specific ways in which Kerala's movements contributed to advancing landfare and welfare. Though these movements were largely concentrated outside Wayanad and therefore did not directly impact the Paniyas, these movements contributed to making inclusivity a key idea in the public discourse in the region through their challenging of prevailing caste structures, and are therefore important in understanding how the overall development pathway of the region took shape. The social reform movements in Kerala touched various strata of the caste hierarchy – the Brahmins, the Nairs, the Ezhavas, the Parayas and the Pulayas, among others. The first two were dominant landlord castes, the third largely tenants or agricultural labourers, and the fourth and the fifth landless agricultural labourers. The graded system of untouchability that prevailed in Kerala then considered the Parayas and the Pulayas far more polluting than the Ezhavas. The reform movements of the Ezhavas, the Parayas, and the Pulayas demanded access to schools, hospitals, public spaces, and temples. This era's social reform movements are widely referred to as the *Navothanam* ("renaissance"). Devika (2008) disapproves of the term, calling it a term that has

no relevance to the Kerala context, compared to the kind of social changes that were brought about by the European renaissance. In the author's view, the social reforms constituted a particular period of improvements in literacy and a new awareness about one's individuality and place in society, under the influence of British colonialism.

Nevertheless, the important point to note here for the purpose of the analysis undertaken in this thesis is that these movements were not merely narrow identity-based movements seeking recognition, but strong political movements that demanded redistribution. For instance, the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam ("society for the preservation of the moral law of Sri Narayana") or SNDP, the social reform movement of the Ezhavas, sought to challenge the very idea of caste under the intellectual leadership of Sri Narayana Guru, and not merely the subordination of the Ezhavas (King 2015). In addition, the movement made access to material resources its key agenda, calling on the Ezhavas to move away from their traditional forms of employment such as the production of coconut products like coir. The movement urged them to take up white-collar employment and new ways of wealth generation as well as encouraging them to demand security of tenure (Osella and Osella 2000). Towards this end, the SNDP had taken charge of leading the business in coconuts and derived products and running a moneylending agency. Similarly, the fishing castes that were considered untouchable in the traditional caste hierarchy coalesced under the "Dheevara" identity, which, although rooted in ideas of the past borrowed from Hindu mythologies, challenged the idea of untouchability and reasserted the right to livelihood derived from fishing. This movement thus negated the social perception that fishing was a polluting occupation (Alex 2020). The Pulaya uprisings, led by the charismatic leader Mahatma Ayyankali, demanded access to schools, public roads, as well as land for setting up dwellings (Basu 2016). The Pratyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha ("God's assembly of visible salvation") of the Paraya converts to Protestant Christianity not only questioned the powerful missionaries but also sought material progress alongside spiritual

salvation (Mohan 2005, 2015). In sum, welfare as well as land were key demands that featured in all of these movements, firmly establishing a foundation of popular movements for redistribution in the region.

A similar uprising against identity-related subordination, with respect to access to resources, was seen in the Mappila rebellions that erupted between 1836 and 1922, the largest of them taking place in 1921. The Mappilas are the largest community of Muslims in Malabar who held the positions of tenancy under Nair and Brahmin landlords in the feudal system. Oppression under these landlords and under the British colonial state that formalised the feudal arrangement as a component of its revenue collection system, sparked outrage among the Mappilas (Panikkar 1989). The Mappila rebellions have produced a rich scholarship, one that contains impassioned debates about whether it was a class struggle, or an uprising driven by subaltern consciousness shaped by notions of justice in Islam, or, less popularly, a Hindu-Muslim conflict (see Arnold 1982, for an overview). The takeaway is that Kerala has had a long history of socio-political movements that highlighted community-specific maldistribution and came together around identity to seek redistribution.

Singh (2011) argues that the *Aikya Keralam* ("united Kerala") movements that occurred along with the anti-colonial struggle exemplified a feeling of "we-ness" that existed among the people of the three regions of today's Kerala, and that this feeling of "sub-nationalism" can help scholars understand the social development achievements of the province (the lack of such a feeling explains the poor achievements of many other Indian provinces, Singh argues). The review of Kerala's development story taken up so far, especially the role played by caste and caste-based mobilisations, clearly shows that such a "we-ness" was at best mythical. In a similar vein, the *Aikya Keralam* movement was a reflection of common historical conditions that various communities found themselves in immediately after independence in 1947, rather than a peculiar feeling of nationalism at the regional level.

Despite the long legacy of anti-caste struggles, welfare transfers under the princely states and postcolonial governments, and the land reforms and working-class mobilisation under the left, inequality between the castes continues in the province. Deshpande (2000) notes this with reference to expenditure on food and clothing, land ownership, and educational levels of the heads of household. The non-SC/ST communities have a much higher probability of having an elite upper-class group than the SCs or STs, Deshpande points out.

Welfare State and Adivasis

The inequality that persists in Kerala can be ascertained particularly in the case of the Paniyas. A survey by the Planning Board of Kerala, a quasi-governmental body composed of academics in charge of advising the government on development planning, found no one among the Paniyas to be working in secure private or public-sector jobs. The majority (55.8 percent) were found to be farm labourers and another significant share (31.4 percent) was non-farm wage labourers (Kerala State Planning Board 2017). The average monthly income of a Paniya individual was found to be Rs.3,769 (roughly £37.69), approximately a tenth of the figure for the whole of Kerala. Seventy two percent of the Paniya households lived in "*kuccha*" or weak structures; fifty six percent of homes had a floor of mud. Eighty six percent drew drinking water from a public tap, against the norm of municipal water supply or private wells within the housing plots in the province. Fifty eight percent of the homes had no toilets; no home had a toilet with a water supply. Glaringly, the report does not provide the extent of landlessness, although the interview schedule appended to the report clearly shows that the survey asked the respondents questions related to landlessness. In a slip, the report admits that the data available on Scheduled Tribe landlessness in the province vary from survey to survey – from 4.8 percent of households (5,153 households) reported by a previous survey by the Government of Kerala to 14.3 percent of households (61,000 households) reported by the National Sample Survey Organisation (61st Round). As the largest Adivasi community in the province, and as a

community that is largely landless, the Paniyas are very likely to find a large presence in these figures.

The inequality persists in spite of targeted welfare programmes. The state in Kerala has taken on the task of improving the wellbeing of Scheduled Tribes since its formation in 1956-57, referring to the category previously as "hill tribes" (or its Malayalam equivalent *girivargakkar*). The terms Scheduled Tribes (or its Malayalam *pattikavargam*) and Adivasis are currently used interchangeably in the official documents. The state clubs together all the 38 Adivasi communities present in the province into the Scheduled Tribe category. Of these, five have been considered Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups or PVTGs (in Wayanad, this includes the Kattunaikas, but not the Paniyas), based on their dwindling numbers and extreme marginalisation. Of the 480,000 Adivasi persons in Kerala, 16.9 percent are Paniyas, making them the largest Adivasi community in the province.

Currently, the Scheduled Tribes Development Department (STDD), under a provincial government minister, is in charge of welfare schemes and landfare measures targeted at the Adivasis. The department has extended bureaucratic machinery stretching from the provincial capital to the Adivasi colonies. The Directorate of Scheduled Tribes Development is the headquarters of the bureaucrats in the provincial capital, with branches under the titles Integrated Tribal Development Programme office and Tribal Development Office all over the province. These branches have further subunits that are closer to the colonies, called the Tribal Extension Offices (TEOs). The TEOs recruit frontline agents called "tribal promoters" from the colonies on two-year contracts. There are around 1,200 promoters for the nearly 5,000 Adivasi settlements in the province. For a total of around 100,000 Adivasi households in the province, this is quite an extensive state machinery. The TEO staff are all persons belonging to the Scheduled Tribes, while the bureaucracy above is recruited through the usual process of public employment following the rules of reservation. A separate institution called the Kerala

Institute for Training and Development Studies of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes focuses on research on Adivasi communities, publishes books on Adivasi languages and culture, and conducts occasional training programmes for Adivasi youth in entrepreneurial development (although Scheduled Castes appear in the name of the institution, the institution's work is almost entirely conducted on Adivasis).

The STDD was formed in 1975 after splitting the "Harijan Welfare Department" ("harijan" or god's people refers to the name that Mahatma Gandhi used to refer to the Dalits). The Integrated Tribal Development Offices opened under the implementation of the "Tribal Sub-Plan," a component of the Five-Year Plan of the central government. These offices continue to operate. Meanwhile, the Tribal Development Offices came up in other areas where Adivasis were present.

The bulk of the welfare support from the department goes into education in the form of "Model Residential Schools," student accommodation, training programmes for lower-end jobs in industries, and scholarships and grants of various kinds to students. The department also covers children below the age of five through various schemes. The second major support is in the health sector, provided in the form of grants covering the cost of medicines as well as the management of clinics, hospitals, and ambulance services in areas with large populations of Adivasis. The Ambedkar Settlement Scheme aims to renovate the colonies by providing amenities like water, housing, sanitation, and roads. The Community Kitchen programme appoints the promoters to physically go to the allotted colonies and cook food for children, pregnant and lactating women, and the elderly. There are special packages to pump in funds into schemes meant solely for the Paniyas, Adiyas, and Kattunaikas. The coverage of welfare programmes, in principle, supports almost every stage of the life cycle. These are, of course, in addition to the universal welfare programmes implemented by the state.

The STDD is also in charge of finding land for the landless Adivasi households, although this task requires the cooperation of the two "land-owning" departments of the provincial government – the Forest Department and the Revenue Department (which is in charge of all non-forest state-owned land). Currently, there are three channels through which land is provided to claimants: the Forest Rights Act (FRA), the Kerala Restriction of Transfer by and Restoration of Lands to Scheduled Tribes Act (KST Act), and a land purchase scheme. The FRA *recognises* traditional habitation in forestlands as well as access rights to non-timber forest products; it does not redistribute any new land. The KST Act seeks to restore land above five acres lost ("alienated") from an Adivasi household and provide alternative land up to five acres to landless households. The land purchase scheme aims to buy land from landowners for a price below a set limit and transfer the land to Adivasis. At the time of the fieldwork, visits to the Integrated Tribal Development Office in Wayanad, which was in charge of coordinating land distribution in the district, revealed that no work was being done with respect to finding land for the Adivasis. The thesis will return to the landfare provisions in greater detail in the chapters ahead.

The persisting unequal status of the Paniyas indicates that not even the welfare schemes, let alone landfare measures, are reaching the landless Adivasis. In popular discourse, their marginalisation is explained as exclusion from the "Kerala model." In this explanation, the colonies continue to exist because the housing programmes have not reached every landless household; malnutrition persists because the grains from the fair price shops do not reach them in a timely manner; unemployment exists because landless Adivasi candidates face discrimination. Scholarship on Adivasi poverty and marginalisation highlight the impacts of globalisation and neoliberal policies on the Adivasis. A key argument in this literature is the apathy of the left towards Adivasi landlessness. The "frozen" class framework of the left is considered in this perspective as indifferent to the specific experiences of the landless Adivasi

communities (Kjosavik 2010, Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2015). Steur (2017) argues that the indifference was particularly felt in the post-liberalisation period, in which livelihood insecurity became particularly worse. This scenario led some Adivasi and Dalit leaders to feel "disidentification" from the left, with which they had initial links, and assert the Adivasi identity politically, an instance of which was the constitution of the autonomous movement, the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha. The author calls for an "expanded class perspective" that pays attention to the ways in which local identities like caste, gender, or race inflect the category of class. Although I agree with Steur's overall argument, I am not in full agreement with the author's observation that it was neoliberal pressures on Kerala's welfare net that suddenly sparked the Adivasi identity to become a political identity. While neoliberal pressures precipitated the land struggles of the late 1980s, the governmentalised category of the Adivasi and the historical landlessness (explored in detail in the next chapter) had been incubating this political identity for a long time. A further explanation is provided by Devika (2013), who identifies a fundamental change in the nature of politics in Kerala in the mid-1990s when the People's Planning Campaign was undertaken. Welfare was no longer sought as a right of the people as a collective, secured through agitations, unlike earlier. Welfare was now bestowed upon the citizens by the state through a civil society that was too close to the state. For the Adivasis, who straddled the civil and the "political" societies (to use the categories put forward by Chatterjee (2008)), identity assertion became the means of highlighting livelihood insecurity as well as the feeling of historic injustice they experienced with respect to landlessness.

This thesis contributes to this scholarship on Adivasi politics in Kerala by providing a granular exploration into the myriad processes through which Adivasi livelihoods have become insecure, because of which their struggles as a surplus population are perpetuated. The empirical chapters demonstrate the contradictions that arise from the Paniyas' position in Kerala. Some aspects of these contradictions are unique, while the others are more

generalisable. For instance, Adivasi demands for cultivable land have come up in the context of an agrarian crisis, a scenario that the whole of the country is reeling under. As in the case of the Paniyas, the inability to farm after receiving land from the state has also been observed in other contexts, making the lessons from Kerala of wider interest. At the same time, the demands of Adivasis for cultivable land have come up despite the presence of a relatively strong welfare state. Although welfare has sparked mobilisation around rights in various parts of the country, Adivasi land struggles have placed their demands vocally in terms of land, indicating that welfare is *not enough*. In the case of the Adivasis, the targeted welfare measures reveal that the transformation of the welfare state that Devika notes above is very much at work; yet there is a parallel trend that is equally underway. The state has targeted people with various landfare measures that do not distribute land substantively, at the same time as bestowing a large number of welfare programmes on the Adivasis. Further, the thesis goes beyond the left's indifference to Adivasi claims (which is an important insight) and shows how the Adivasi land claims interact with the state in Kerala (shaped by alternate rule by the left and the Indian National Congress governments) and how, in these interactions, we can see the state's assumptions regarding Adivasi lives.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion brought out the main aspects of the development experience in Kerala that will have a bearing on the enquiry into Adivasi land struggles undertaken in the following chapters. The chapter discussed how the redistribution regime in Kerala was shaped historically, demonstrating that the idea of inclusivity was at the core of this experience right from the precolonial period. Landfare and welfare measures to address the survival needs of people were an integral part of this redistribution regime, shaped by the welfare and land transfers undertaken by the princely states, welfare and land demands made by the anti-caste movements, and the welfare initiatives undertaken by the missionaries. Caste was a fulcrum

point of mobilisation as well as welfare governance in the princely states, a scenario that was inherited by the province of Kerala when it was formed in the post-independence period. The precolonial history of the region also showed that community-based movements that highlighted the links between caste position and redistributive injustice also had a long history in the region; the Adivasi land struggles of the late 1980s onwards can be said to have had this foundation of redistributive struggles to build on.

Equally important in shaping the redistribution regime was the role of the left parties. While some of their work benefitted the landless Adivasis as part of the labouring class, others marginalised them. The unionisation of labour, the institution of welfare funds for agricultural labourers, and the establishment of welfare programmes targeted at Adivasis can be said to have provided access to the welfare state in the early years after independence. At the same time, the landless Adivasis were largely untouched by land reforms and were only partially integrated into local governance structures and poverty eradication programmes. Even in the case of welfare measures, the poor living conditions in the colonies indicate that these were not sufficient to help the landless Adivasis withstand the onslaught of neoliberal market policies and the loss of access to the commons.

The chapter also outlined how the growth path of Kerala took shape alongside its redistribution regime. There were multiple trajectories that contributed to this development experience, many of which provided avenues of social mobility for specific groups. The land reforms, the emigration to the Middle East, and the turnaround of the trend of low productivity by the end of the 1980s were some of the trajectories. Landless Adivasis like the Paniyas were largely excluded from directly partaking in these trajectories.

The state has become the main arena in which redistributive conflicts are articulated in Kerala. The expansion of the welfare state through decentralisation and targeted programmes

were also processes that established the state's towering presence in the lives of the people, including the Adivasis. This has, in fact, dwarfed the role of other organisations like community-based organisations, civil society organisations, religious or secular charitable institutions, or the Maoist rebels in providing welfare. The welfare state has established elaborate bureaucratic machinery to deliver its many welfare programmes, which seek to cover every stage of the life cycle. The chapters ahead will explore why land, rather than further integration into the welfare state, has become the main demand of the Paniyas' struggles and how the specific experience of being a surplus population in the contemporary growth path of Kerala sparks these land struggles.

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3 | God's Own Colonies

I first came to Geetha's colony when I was in the vicinity to attend an *oorukoottam*, the village assembly of all the adult Adivasis in a *panchayath ward*. The *oorukoottam* was taking place in an *anganavadi*, the state-run creche. The concrete building with shiny, tiled floors presented the best of Kerala's welfare state: the creche provided midday meals and had well-equipped play areas and bookshelves. Geetha's colony stood right behind this building. It had around 15 houses next to each other in 10 cents of land. The colony lay on the slope of a hill, surrounded by the walled plots of the *chettanmaar* (Syrian Christians) on two sides, a church on the third, and the *anganavadi* on the fourth.[5] Each house in the colony had two rooms, except Geetha's, which was a temporary shack erected with plastic sheets (figure 3.1). A pipe running along one edge of the colony brought water to this settlement. The pipe often leaked, mixing drinking water with the waste from the only toilet here, as the residents complained in the *oorukoottam*. The water supply was brought through the Jalanidhi ("water fund") project, which charged the residents a fixed amount every month, a remnant of the project's origins in the World Bank loans of the early 2000s.

[5] The name "Syrian" Christian refers to their historical affiliation to the East and the West Syriac churches and the use of Syriac liturgy. Their conversion is dated back to the second to fourth centuries.


Figure 3.1: Geetha's house. Image by the author.

The colony residents were not clear about who owned the land. There could be an ancestral title that was lost. In equal probability, the land could belong to the Revenue Department of the state or to one or several of the landowning households in the neighbourhood. All residents had been agricultural labourers previously and now worked in any available daily-wage position. In one of my subsequent visits to the colony, Geetha was home, as work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was temporarily unavailable. We sat down for a chat in front of her house. Our conversation meandered from land to labour to films and books.

"*Geethechi*, did you read the novel I gave?"

"Which one? *Nadikalaakaan*? Yes."[6]

"Did you like it?"

[6] *Nadikalaakaan Kshanikkunnu* ("inviting you to be rivers") is a Malayalam novel by Balan Vengara (2016). The book talks about Paniya landlessness and their struggles for land.

"The part where Ammini has to dig a grave inside her shack to bury her husband – that is so true. It happens a lot."

***

This chapter tries to make sense of colonies, the cramped settlements of the Paniyas, in an attempt to understand where the Paniyas are produced as a surplus population. There are close to 5,000 Adivasi colonies in the province today, with 2,000 of them in Wayanad alone (figure 3.2).[7] Though the term "colony" is commonly used in South Asia to refer to urban neighbourhoods, mostly of middle or upper-class households, its usage in Kerala with respect to the settlements of the landless Adivasis and Dalits immediately evokes the connotations of stigma, scorn, and derision. This chapter delves into how the colonies were produced, how they are reproduced, and how they let us see the tensions between landfare and welfare. I begin with a broad sketch of the caste relations in Wayanad, leaving the complexities therein to vignettes in the later paragraphs. This is followed by a brief description of the Paniyas' history of slavery that they share with the other agricultural labourer castes of Kerala. The historical production of the Paniya settlements is explored next, followed by a close look at the spatiality and the lived experience of the colonies. Scattered between the plots of upper-caste neighbours, colonies produce an intimate experience of the state, caste, humiliation, and violence in the everyday lives of the Paniya community.

[7] There are 25,000 Dalit colonies in Kerala. Dalits constitute around nine percent of the province's population, while Adivasis constitute 1.5 percent.



Figure 3.2: A Paniya colony in Wayanad. Image by the author.

The Wayanadan Society

As a point of departure, the governmental categories used to determine eligibility for reservation, India's affirmative action, provide a rough sketch of the caste relations in Wayanad. The Nairs, the Jains, and the Syrian Christians are placed in the "General" category that is not eligible for reservation, indicative of their upper-caste status. The Muslims, the Ezhavas-Thiyyas, the artisan castes, and the Wayanadan Chettys are in the Other Backward Classes, reflecting the intermediate position they occupy in society. The Scheduled Tribe category consists of the Kurichya, Kuruma, Adiya, Paniya, Kattunaika, Wayanadan Kadar, Thachanadan Mooppar, and Bettakuruma communities. The first two have traditionally been landowning communities and enjoy social status comparable to the General category. The Kurichyas are said to have practised untouchability from the other Adivasi communities until a few decades ago. The Kurumas claim to have descended from the earliest ruling clan of Wayanad and are still often referred to as *moppanmaar* ("chiefs") by the Adiyas, the Paniyas, and the Kattunaikas. The Thachanadan Mooppar, Wayanadan Kadar, and Bettakuruma communities were added to the list of Scheduled Tribes only in 2002, while the other five have

been on the list since the Presidential Order on the Scheduled Tribes of 1950, the first such official list in independent India. The Adiyas, the Paniyas, and to some extent the Kattunaikas, were bonded agricultural labourers until the early decades of independence, although the British colonial administration had brought out legislation abolishing slavery way back in 1843. These communities have been landless in recorded history as well as in their own oral histories (Aiyappan 1992, Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2015, Mathur 1977). The Kattunaikas lived close to the forests, collecting forest products. Eventually, they too became agricultural labourers and today, they live between the forests and sites of wage labour.

Until around the fifteenth century, the Kurichyas and the Kurumas held chiefly rights over the land and forests in Wayanad (Kjosavik 2010). The Adiyas, the Paniyas, and the Kattunaikas received permission from these two communities to practise shifting cultivation, access forests, and set up dwellings. This system of rather free access changed with the settlement of outsiders, beginning with the Jains, the Wayanadan Chettys, and the Nairs around the fifteenth century. The settlements introduced a landlord-tenant system that was prevalent in the rest of Kerala, reduced the Adiyas and the Paniyas to agricultural bonded labourers, and restricted the freedom of the Kattunaikas in accessing the forests. In 1766, Wayanad was annexed by the neighbouring Kingdom of Mysore, leading to further settlement, this time by the Mappilas (the largest community of Muslims in Kerala). They initially arrived as timber traders and soon became tenants and landlords. The trade sought to capture control over the forests, further restricting the three Adivasi communities' access to land and forests (*ibid*.). The annexation of Wayanad by the British in 1792 led to the setting up of plantations and the closure of forests through the Indian Forest Act 1865, resulting in large-scale eviction of the three communities from their lands and forests.

The most prolific settlement of Wayanad was that of the Syrian Christians in the twentieth century. They first came as planters in the 1920s, carrying the surplus they had earned

from their estates in southern Kerala. In Wayanad, they took up large tracts of land, leading to the eviction of the Adiyas and the Paniyas. Land was available here at a fraction of the price in southern Kerala. In the 1940s, Syrian Christians began to arrive as farmers in large numbers, considerably changing the demographics of Wayanad. They are said to have brought wage-based labour to Wayanad's agriculture. Settlement gathered further momentum with the Grow More Food campaigns and the Wynad Colonisation Scheme of the 1940s.[8] The colonisation scheme cleared state-owned forests for the settlement of retired armed personnel as well as a few local residents. Adivasis' access to the forests was curtailed further. In independent India, the settlers had a lobbying force in the Kerala Congress Party, an influential political party with a Syrian Christian base and an ally of the Indian National Congress. Consistent bargaining by the Kerala Congress facilitated the granting of private property titles to the settlers (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2015). Meanwhile, the Adiyas, the Paniyas, and the Kattunaikas continued to be landless with no political influence to receive land or titles over the pieces of land on which they had their dwellings.

Slavery

This section provides a brief overview of the slavery of agricultural labourers that existed in Kerala in the pre-independence period (i.e. before 1947). In the case of the Adiyas, the Paniyas, and the Kattunaikas, the practice continued until the 1970s, in spite of colonial legislation in 1843 calling for an abolition of the system. Only a brief overview is provided here with the aim of justifying the use of the term slavery with regard to the Paniyas' historical position in agrarian relations.

Slavery in the region that forms today's Kerala considered agricultural labourers as the property of the landlords (Saradamoni 1974). Slaves were sold, temporarily lent, or mortgaged

[8] "Wynad" was the former spelling of Wayanad.

along with the land. They were gifted to temples or individuals. The landlords also widely exercised their right to kill the slaves (Mohan 2005). With its origins in the caste system, slavery was thoroughly exploited by the colonial rulers, from the Portuguese to the Dutch, from the French to the British. The British administrators in the region referred to the practice as "agrestic slavery," distinguishing it from the comparatively less severe domestic slavery that was also found in the region. It is through the recordings of these administrators that we know about the characteristics of the system. These studies, mostly produced in the nineteenth century, were characterised by an overwhelming optimism about the situation of slavery in the region. This trend was broken only when district-level officers occasionally took the trouble to make personal inquiries (Hjejle 1967).

John Sullivan, one of the earliest officers to record slavery in the region, noted that "There is no race or people in India in a condition so utterly wretched as the slaves of Malabar and Wynad," (Sullivan 1814, cited in Thomas (1999, 601)). Major Walker, another British officer in Malabar, made the following observation in his report *Slavery in India* (Walker 1828, cited in Saradamoni (1973, 375)):

> The Chermas (Walker's spelling) are absolute property; they are part of the livestock on an estate. In selling and buying land it is not necessary that they should follow the soil; both kinds of property are equally disposable and may fall into different hands. The Chermas may be sold, leased, and mortgaged, like the land itself, or like any cattle or things.

The administrators often referred to the slave castes using the term Cherumas, a caste name already prevalent in the region then. Interpreted as either "small people" or "people of the dirt/soil," the term was occasionally used synonymously with the Pulayas, the largest slave caste in the region (the Pulayas are today a Scheduled Caste). H.S. Greame, the colonial officer who submitted a report on revenue administration in Malabar in 1822, recorded 21 castes that belonged to the category Cherumas, which included the Paniyas, Adiyas, and Kattunaikas of

Wayanad (Graeme 2010 [1822]). Greame recorded that Paniya men were rented out for three *poddies* of Paddy, mortgaged under the *kanum* lease for 20 rupees, and sold for 40 rupees.[9] Paniya boys and girls were rented or mortgaged at the same value; the boys were sold for 12 rupees and the girls for a little above three rupees. Although Paniya women's values were not recorded, values recorded for women of slave castes in other areas of colonial Malabar indicate that separating a couple to sell or lend them was a widespread practice. The children provided a continuous supply of labour to the masters. They were separated from their parents and sold whenever the landlord wished (Saradamoni 1973).

Francis Buchanan, the colonial officer commissioned to conduct a survey of southern India, recorded the detailed characteristics of slavery as it existed in the Kerala region in his report of 1807. The report noted that the slaves were the absolute property of their landlords (Buchanan 1870 [1807]). The slaves had to perform any task that the landlord asked for and were sold or transferred as per the latter's wish. Referring to hutments of the nature of the *paadis* of the Paniyas (next section), Buchanan observed, "They erect for themselves small temporary huts that are little better than large baskets. These are placed in the rice fields while the crop is on the ground, and near the stacks while it is trashing" (p. 370). The exact sale price or loan amount varied from caste to caste, but each caste had a fixed price in a district that was carefully recorded by the colonial administrators. Buchanan recorded that in the event of the death of a rented or leased slave, the original owner had to be supplied with a slave of equal value (*ibid*.). The non-colonial origins of the system provided the British a much-needed justification which they used in order to exploit these practices. Buchanan observed:

[9] *Poddies* refers to a measure of grains. *Kanum* is a form of lease of land.

> This is a custom that ought to be recommended to our West Indian planters, and if adopted, I am persuaded would soon induce the Negro women to breed and would give a sufficient supply of inhabitants without having recourse to an annual importation from Africa (p. 371).

The 1843 legislation abolishing slavery hardly made any difference to the practice, largely because the colonial rulers did not find it judicious to interfere in a system that supplied labour to their plantations; the system was justified as a part and parcel of the local social organisation. Colonial officers wrongly argued, before inquiries from their homeland, that slaves were not transported outside the country. These arguments kept India out of the Emancipation Act of 1833 that sought to free the slaves in the British colonies (Saradamoni 1974). Abolition was to be carried out in a quiet manner without any proclamation or checks, which in effect meant that the system was covertly allowed to continue. To give an example of the weak instruments put in place to end slavery, the Malabar collector in 1838 granted permission to the process of remission of tax arrears from the landlords in return for promises that they would improve the living conditions of the slaves.[10] Though an earlier order of 1792 in Malabar and an 1812 royal proclamation in the princely state of Travancore had sought to abolish slavery, agrestic slavery was kept out of their purview, thereby excluding a large part of the slave population. Further, the princely states feared that the missionaries would use slavery as a means of turning the slave castes against the landlords and repeatedly insisted on the slaves' position in the caste system as being necessary for social harmony.

Colonial officer Samuel Mateer noted the slow progress of abolition efforts in his book *Land of Charity* (1870) and recorded that in Travancore, a Syrian Christian sold four slave women after separating them from their husbands just a year after an abolition proclamation was brought out (Saradamoni 1973). Mateer suggested that the physical boundaries of Kerala,

[10] The collector was the top civil servant of the district. This powerful position continues to exist today.

marked by the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea on the two sides, prevented the slaves from running away, and observed that the condition of the slaves here was worse than that of the Pariahs (colonial spelling) of the neighbouring Tamil-speaking areas of the Madras State. Mateer belonged to a group of those British officers who considered slavery in India as different from slavery elsewhere; he wrote that for the slaves of Malabar, slavery was a "second nature," having been born into it, which made them not feel any "impatience, irksomeness arising from the cherished memory of rights and comforts once enjoyed" or develop "a spirit of proud independence conscious of a title to higher privileges" (Mateer 1870, cited in (Saradamoni 1973, 384)).

The "emancipation" (the colonial term) of the slaves was the slowest in Wayanad, notes Hjejle (1967). Only 11 percent of the slaves could break free after the 1843 legislation, based on the colonial records of 1857. This was in spite of the fact that the British had established plantations in Wayanad that provided the alternative of wage labour. The landlords in Wayanad actively prevented their slaves from working in the plantations. Even when the latter was given permission to do so, a part of the wages had to be given to the former. In various testimonials before colonial authorities, European settlers in Wayanad expressed serious doubts about the slaves' awareness regarding the 1843 Act and noted that even if the slaves tried to run away, they were aggressively chased and brought back. A further reason that dissuaded the slaves from seeking employment in the plantations was that while the landlords provided hutments (or the permission to erect one on their lands) to slave families, this facility was not available in the plantations. Therefore, the few men who were allowed to seek plantation labour had to return in time for rice cultivation to join their families.

Slaves were actively exported to other countries by the colonial powers. Here I provide only a brief reference to the emerging literature on this aspect, to indicate the extent of slavery. It is not clear whether or to what extent the Paniyas were a part of this trade. The Portuguese,

the French, and the Dutch colonial powers that ruled in parts of the Kerala region before the British captured slaves for sale in their colonies elsewhere (Paul 2019). For the French, Mahe in Malabar was a major port for the export of slaves to the islands of Bourbon and Mauritius (Jayasree 2006). At Cochin port, used by the Dutch, 39 percent of the sellers were European, while 38 percent were Syrian Christian (Mbeki and van Rossum 2017). The slaves were exported to Cape Town and from there to the other parts of Africa. The slaves were brought in custom-built ships and sold to the Dutch in Cape Town (Vink 2003). The Dutch had already been exporting slaves from Bengal; the pace accelerated with their seizure of Portuguese territories in Malabar.

Paadis **to Colonies**

Although the Paniyas formed the largest slave population in Wayanad, accounts of colonial administrators do not seem to have produced any detailed record of their habitations, except for occasional and passing mentions. William Logan, one of the colonial district collectors, notes: "The slaves as a caste will never understand what real freedom means until measures are adopted to give indefeasible rights on the small orchards occupied by them as houses" (Logan 1887, 145). The mention of "indefeasible" or inalienable rights referred to a context in which the Paniyas lived on plots of other communities with no recognition of their own rights over such pieces of land. Logan, a keen observer of the local peoples and a student of the Malayalam language, had noted early on during his assignment as the collector of Malabar that the land tenure system in the region was different from the *zamindari* found in many other parts of the country. He had pointed out to his government that the local system consisted of a hierarchy of tenancies with the top landlord holding only symbolic overlordship. The government, however, rejected this view and recognised *janmis* (landlords with hereditary rights over land) from upper-castes as private proprietors in charge of land tax collection. This was a defining moment in which the Paniyas lost access to land and became confined to

earmarked settlements. One of Logan's successors, Charles Alexander Innes noted that "In physiognomy they (the Paniyas) are an almost negroid type with black skin, curly hair, and broad noses. Their huts are called chalas and groups of huts are known as padis" (Innes and Evans 1951, 136). These *paadis* were the precursors of today's colonies (figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3: A Paniya *paadi* in Wayanad. Image by Damodaran (1974), taken in 1972.

Edgar Thurston, the colonial anthropologist commissioned to create profiles of peoples of southern India, complete with their nasal and cranial measurements, wrote:

> The Paniyas settle down happily on estates, living in a settlement consisting of rows of huts and detached huts, single or double stories, built of bamboo and thatched. During the hot weather, in the unhealthy months which precede the advent of the south-west monsoon, they shift their quarters to live near streams, or in other cool, shady spots, returning to their headquarters when the rains set in (Thurston and Rangachari 1909, 20).

It is unclear whether "estates" here meant the farmland properties of the *janmis* or the plantations established by the colonial administration. The plantations (starting with coffee and tea), established in the middle of the nineteenth century, are known to have brought wage-

based labour to Wayanad. It is likely that Thurston's reference was to the *janmis'* properties as the Paniyas' bondage persisted up until the 1970s. Also hinted in Thurston is the landlessness of the Paniyas, who are noted to have shifted between the estates and the riverside. The riversides were not habitable when it rained, indicating that these were floodplains. *Paadis* on floodplains were stuck there as eventually the Paniyas lost free mobility on land.

The gradual transformation of the *paadis* to the colonies can be understood by locating these settlements in the wider political history of landfare and welfare in the region. In 1888, the king of Travancore had set up an unelected legislature called the Sri Moolam Praja Sabha (Praja Sabha meant people's assembly; Moolam referred to the king's birth star as per the local calendar). It was a time when the castes that were considered untouchable at the time – the Pulayas and the Parayas, among others – were rising in organised movements. Mahatma Ayyankali, the Pulaya leader, was a vocal force in the Praja Sabha since 1912. He consistently drew attention to the landlessness of the Pulayas and demanded that they be granted land for mass settlement. These settlements came to be called colonies. The provision of land to the lower castes was aimed at the reproduction of their labour power by giving them dwelling grounds, rather than giving ownership over a means of production, or granting social and political control over land. Pramod (2018) writes that the first such colony was set up in Sachivothamapuram in Kottayam district in 1936. The term "colonisation" was already being used to refer to a number of programmes initiated in all the three regions of erstwhile Kerala to resettle a diverse set of people.

My reading of the Kerala Legislative Assembly documents shows that in the case of the Adivasis, the term "colonies" was initially used to refer to state-sponsored resettlement sites, but the word gradually came to be attached to every Paniya, Adiya, and Kattunaika settlement in Wayanad. In the Question and Answer Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, the earliest reference to colonies appears in 1960, wherein a member asked the minister

concerned if there were plans to establish a colony for the tribes in Alakkode in Kannur district (KLA 1960). By the 1980s, the term started to appear in the Legislative Assembly archives to refer to all Adivasi settlements, or as indistinguishable from them. For instance, in 1988, the government reported to the assembly that there were 139 Adivasi colonies in Attappady, a large Adivasi area in Palakkad district. In 1989, 3,945 "Scheduled Tribe colonies and settlements" were reported in the assembly as existing in the province (KLA 1989).

The land reforms of the 1970s marked a turning point in the history of Kerala. As noted in the previous chapter, the land reforms failed to end the landlessness of the Adivasis and the Dalits. Agricultural labourer households were supposed to get up to 10 cents of land. There is no data on how many Paniya households received land under this provision. If at all any Paniya household received land, the maximum size allotted meant that these plots became cramped after a couple of generations. It is also possible that many Paniya households did not submit an application because of a lack of information. The first question about Adivasi land distribution appears in the Legislative Assembly Proceedings in 1971, asking if the land meant for the Adivasis was actually distributed to them, and if not, what the reason for the delay was. The government response stated that 2,062.69 hectares had been kept aside for assignment to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in Wayanad, of which 1,460.91 hectares had already been assigned, and no request was pending in South Wayanad *taluk* (KLA 1971).[11] This area included my field site. The continuance of landlessness in this area in contemporary times clearly indicates how a large number of Paniya households were excluded at this juncture. Thus, the failure of the land reforms ensured the continuance of the colonies.

Mathur (1977) observes another mechanism through which the land reforms deceived the Paniyas. Based on fieldwork in 1972 in the same area of Wayanad as my field site, Mathur

[11] *Taluk* is the subunit of a district, used for revenue collection.

shows that those Paniyas who had received land under the Wynad Colonisation Scheme were suddenly pointed out as landlords by upper-caste farmers. As noted before, the Wynad Colonisation Scheme was initiated in 1948 to resettle armed force personnel who retired from service to the British in the Second World War and, to a small extent, landless Adivasis. The farmers had lent money to the Paniyas in return for permission to farm on Paniya lands. The lenders showed themselves as tenants and received permanent rights under the land reforms.

In 1975, the government led by the Communist Party of India (CPI) implemented the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction of Transfer of Land and Restoration of Alienated Land) Act that promised the restoration of alienated lands to all Adivasis who had lost their lands after 1 January 1960.[12] As Bijoy and Raman (2003) point out, this Act was never implemented under pressure from various lobbies, especially the settlers in Wayanad. The non-implementation meant the persistent growth of cramped colonies. The Kerala Legislative Assembly Proceedings show the ministers in charge consistently providing vague answers to questions regarding the implementation of the 1975 Act. Question and Answers from 1988 indicate that around 8,000 applications for land were received under the law till then, of which only 103 were resolved and land restored (KLA 1989). The plots distributed were all in Thiruvananthapuram, Malappuram, and Palakkad districts.

This law was finally repealed in 1999 and a new law was brought in. The new Kerala Restriction on Transfer by and Restoration of Lands to Scheduled Tribes Act made two major changes. First, alienated lands below five acres were *not* to be restored. This was considered a curtailment of justice as many Adivasis who had lost land had never owned more than five

[12] The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was in the opposition. The government (1970-77) was formed by the "United Front," consisting of the Communist Party of India, the Indian National Congress, the Indian Union Muslim League, and a few other parties. This alliance broke up in 1979, leading to the formation of the current alliances – the United Democratic Front and the Left Democratic Front.

acres. Second, up to five acres of land for cultivation was promised to Adivasis who had zero to less than five acres of land, thereby changing the narrative from *restoration* of alienated lands to *distribution* of alternative land. The law was inaugurated with much fanfare by the then Communist government in Attappady (figure 3.4). This law was not implemented either. The 1999 law finally reached the Supreme Court where its validity was questioned. The court upheld parts of the Act and asked for its speedy implementation. Land distribution schemes are now implemented (Chapter 6) with the implicit understanding of implementing this Act.



Land for Children of the Soil

Complete solution for Scheduled Tribe Landlessness

State-level Inauguration

10 July 1999, 11 am, Agali

[Messages by E.K. Nayanar, Chief Minister, and K.E. Ismail, Revenue Minister]

Another promise by the LDF govt. is fulfilled:

- Same amount of land to ST people whose lands were alienated
- One acre to the landless
- Extra land for those with less than one acre
- Housing for STs
- Integrated programme for STs

Figure 3.4: Government advertisement in newspapers (10 July 1999). Image from Mathrubhumi archives; translation by the author.

The state set up several land distribution projects following the recommendations of a Madhava Menon Commission, which was constituted to study the socio-economic problems faced by Adivasi communities. The commission called for the distribution of lands taken over

from individuals under a 1971 law. This led to the creation of the Priyadarshini tea estate, the Sugandhagiri cardamom estate, the Cheeyambam coffee estate, and the Pookode dairy project, all of them in Wayanad. These projects were carved out of forestlands. Only a few households took up these lands as they found the sites uncultivable and/or far away from alternative means of livelihood. Except in the Priyadarshini estate, the state failed to establish complementary projects to ensure that the projects ran profitably and provided incomes to the resident households. We begin to see here the narrowing of landfare into the piecemeal distribution of land in the form of one-off projects, without long-term goals of creating sustainable livelihoods. These consistent failures meant that the colonies continued to exist.

Colonies to *Jaathicolonies*

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, malnutrition deaths shook the Adivasi colonies in Wayanad and Attappady. These deaths were an early indication that welfare, represented by the public provision of food and a public health system, had its limits. The first of the malnutrition deaths in this period took place in the Marakkadavu Paniya colony in Wayanad. The incident became a trigger for a young Adiya woman, C.K. Janu to rise and demand land for all landless Adivasis in the province. Janu led her followers to the Secretariat, the seat of the government ministries in the capital city Thiruvananthapuram, in 2001. They erected shacks and began a struggle that lasted for about two months. The struggle came to be called the *Kudilketti Samaram* ("struggle by erecting shacks"). The Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha ("grand assembly of the Adivasis") was born here. The struggle concluded when the Congress-led government entered into an agreement with the protesters. The agreement promised the distribution of land – a minimum of one acre and a maximum of five acres – to all landless Adivasi households, the creation of livelihoods in the distributed land, and the inclusion of all Adivasi lands in the Fifth Schedule of the Indian constitution. The Fifth Schedule provided special safeguards, including decision-making rights over the use of land and minerals; Kerala has never had any Fifth Schedule area.

The agreement with the Adivasis also promised the implementation of its provisions by 31 December 2002. Thus, the government guaranteed that Adivasi landlessness would be wiped out of the province by this date. A new state agency called the Tribal Resettlement and Development Mission was set up to implement the agreement, tasked with the identification of plots suitable for distribution as well as the identification of beneficiaries. The roll-out of the project started well initially, leading to the distribution of a few hundred plots in southern Kerala.

However, there was no sight of the project in Wayanad. The government identified 3,000 acres of land for distribution in Aralam in Kannur district, adjacent to Wayanad. However, only a few beneficiaries selected were from Wayanad. These households went over to Aralam only to find that the land was not habitable. They came back and continued to live in their old colonies (this story is taken up for detailed examination later in chapter 7). There was no news of the declaration of Fifth Schedule areas in the province. These events prompted Janu and her followers to occupy a stretch of unused land in the Muthanga forests in Wayanad in January 2003 and resolve to set up an "Adivasi republic." On 19 February that year, the Congress government ordered a police crackdown of the struggle. The violence and arson that ensued resulted in the death of Jogi, an Adiya man, and Vinod, a Dalit policeman. The Muthanga *Sambhavam* (Muthanga Incident) became a landmark in the political history of Kerala. Steur (2017) argues that the *Kudilketti Samaram* and the Muthanga *Sambhavam* prompted the tribes of Kerala to actively identify as Adivasis, and no longer as mere agricultural labourers. "Adivasi" seemed to have transformed into a political identity that garnered public attention, from being merely a sociological and governmental category. The incident also drew wide media attention to the plight of the Adivasi colonies.

I pause here to reflect on the achievements of the *Kudilketti Samaram* and the Muthanga *Sambhavam*. These turning points revealed the implicit tension between landfare and welfare:

landless Adivasis pointed out through these struggles that welfare was not enough. The public provision of food, public healthcare, and education as well as land distributed without the creation of sustainable livelihoods only helped subsidise the reproduction of labour power and did not grant substantive control over the resource called land. The rejection of received lands in Aralam also gives an indication that the Adivasis did not agree with the life that the state had imagined for them – a life in which the Adivasis were supposed to improve their lives merely with an (unproductive) acre of land while being cut off from any source of wage labour.

Like the landfare measures taken up with respect to the Adivasis in the 1975 law and the 1999 law described previously, the demands of the organised land struggles of the Adivasis also shifted from restoration of alienated lands to distribution of alternative cultivable lands. In 1999, the state had argued that the law enacted that year would be more beneficial to historically landless Adivasi communities like the Paniyas, as it promised land to all landless households, and not just those who had lost their land to settlers. The organised social movements largely accepted this argument, and the demand for restoration of alienated lands died down.

Land struggles continued to occur all over Kerala. In August 2007, landless households in the province got together under the title Sadhujana Samyuktha Vimochana Vedi ("united liberation forum of the poor") and occupied plantation land held by the tea corporate Harrison Malayalam in Chengara, Pathanamthitta district (see map in figure 3.5). Apart from Adivasis, the struggle had participation from landless Dalit and Muslim households as well. After two years, the Left Democratic Front government entered into an agreement with the protesters and agreed to distribute an acre of land to every eligible household in the struggle (Keraleeyam 2017). In total 800 acres were to be distributed to 1,738 households identified as the beneficiaries (Sandeep 2013). The Aralam story was repeated here: many households found

the lands uncultivable and cut off from sources of wage labour and were forced to return to their colonies.



Figure 3.5: Major land struggle sites in Kerala. Template map by Nordnordwest, Wikicommons.

In 2012, these households moved to a new site in Arippa, Kollam district, and renewed their struggle in 54 acres of a state-owned rubber plantation (figure 3.5). There were 1,300 households from Adivasi, Dalit, Muslim, and lower-caste Christian communities. The protesters called themselves the Adivasi-Dalit Munnetta Samithi ("forum for the progress of Adivasis and Dalits"). The struggle raised the slogan "from hundred-thousand houses to cultivable land" (Sandeep 2013). The reference here is to the *Laksham Veedu* Scheme ("hundred-thousand houses scheme") that was initiated by a CPI-led government in 1972 to build one hundred thousand homes for landless Dalit households. The slogan of the Arippa struggle firmly placed the demand for land that was cultivable and called for an agrarian future. This call was bolstered by the few families who had received cultivable land in Chengara: they

set up a "model village" and started farming with the aim of demonstrating that farm lives were sustainable.

In 2014, Janu and her followers were back in front of the Secretariat. They demanded the implementation of the 2001 agreement between the government and the Adivasis. The struggle adopted the strategy of standing up and refusing to sit until the demands were met, earning it the name *Nilpu Samaram* ("stand up struggle"). *Nilpu Samaram* received wide coverage in the Malayalam press, leading to an outpouring of support from various civil society organisations and ordinary citizens. After 162 days of protest, the Indian National Congress-led government came to a compromise again and arrived at a sixteen-point agreement with the Adivasis. This agreement stated that land would be distributed to all landless Adivasi households, the Forest Rights Act would be implemented, and Adivasi settlements and plots would be declared as Fifth Schedule areas.[13] This agreement too remained on paper.

The figure of the colonies returned in the next major protest that rocked Kerala. In 2017, around 50 Adivasi and Dalit organisations came together under the title Bhoo Adhikara Samrakshana Samithi ("forum for the protection of land rights") and began a rally from the northern end of the province to the southern end. The rally, titled *Chalo Thiruvananthapuram* ("march to Thiruvananthapuram") raised the slogan "annihilation of caste through the annihilation of colonies" (Kerala Freethinkers Forum 2017). The march was led by Jignesh Mevani, a popular Dalit leader from the western Indian province of Gujarat who had led land struggles there, and demanded the distribution of corporate-held plantation lands. Around 500,000 acres of land were reportedly held by corporates under expired leases. Marching across

[13] The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, commonly known as the Forest Rights Act, was passed in 2006 to provide title documents (known as Records of Rights) to Scheduled Tribes as well as some other communities that had lived in the forests for generations. The law grants 'individual rights' to households and 'community rights' to communities. The latter includes the right to access a range of forest products and build infrastructure within the restrictions mentioned.

the length of Kerala, the movement called on the state to "wipe out *jaathicolonies* and rebuild the Kerala model." The rally thus explicitly affixed the term *jaathi* (caste) to the colonies of Adivasis, Dalits, fishers, and plantation labourers, indicating that the continuing presence of the colonies marked the persistent, oppressive operation of caste.

Thus, the post-Muthanga land struggles further brought to light the attempts of the state to reduce landfare to the minimalist distribution of plots that only aimed to pacify the protesters momentarily and put out the struggles overall. The resistance movements outlined above present how the expansion of welfare measures described in the previous chapter ran parallel to diluted measures of landfare. Loss of wage labour from disparate livelihood sectors (elaborated in the next chapter) meant that welfare measures were inadequate to address the reproduction of labour power. The historical expulsion from land and forests as well as contemporary livelihood expulsions mean that a long history steered the gradual conversion of the Paniyas into a surplus population confined to the labour reserves of the colonies.

Spatiality

Geetha, who we met at the beginning of this chapter, had come to the colony after her marriage. When space ran out in the two-room house of her parents-in-law, they asked her to move out with her three children. She put up a shack with a few poles and some plastic sheets in the sliver of empty space available in the middle of the colony. Geetha's was a typical Paniya colony, situated close to paddy fields. Other colonies could be closer to the forests or right at the frontier. The Adiya, Paniya, and Kattunaika colonies lie scattered between the plots owned by upper-caste households and, increasingly, by tourist resorts. With every generation, the colonies become more crowded. In a census of a *panchayath ward* in Wayanad, 63 percent of the Paniya households were found to hold less than 10 cents of land, indicative of colonies (Nair, Vinod, and Menon 2007). Thirty nine percent of all agricultural wage labourers in the ward were Paniyas. The colonies stand in stark contrast with the norm in Kerala – private plots

with standalone houses, many of which are increasingly two-storeyed, a product of the land reforms and the social mobility achieved by the upper and middle castes.

The spatiality of the colonies had dire consequences during times of shock and disaster. This aspect became clear to me when I helped the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha conduct a survey of around 100 Adiya, Paniya, and Kattunaika colonies that were affected by the floods that had ravaged Wayanad (and the rest of Kerala) in 2018 and 2019. Most houses were beyond repair (figure 3.6). I soon realised that the questions I had framed for the survey were inadequate as they did not consider the spatial distribution of the colonies. The colonies that were flooded mostly lay on floodplains between rivers or streams and paddy fields. This observation brought out how the colonies came to be located in these places: Paniya households were shown vulnerable, undesirable spots for setting up their dwellings by the landlords of bygone times. This was the story of Palakkode, the colony that opened Chapter 1, whose residents were flooded almost every year and were pushed into a land struggle in the neighbouring forestland. What slowly emerges from this are the ways in which the production of surplus populations coincided with their incremental confinement to unwanted lands over centuries.



Figure 3.6: A flood-impacted Paniya colony in Wayanad. Image by Jaggu da Vinci, survey team.

Colonies are also spaces where the Paniyas encounter the state. Colonies are sites through which the state confines, disciplines, and governs the landless Adivasi population. When I had to seek permission from the government to conduct fieldwork in the Adivasi settlements, I needed to come up with a list of colonies that I would visit. I managed to get a full list of colonies from the Tribal Exchange Office, the local unit of the Scheduled Tribes Development Department, in Sulthan Bathery. Here began the encounter of colonies as a unit of landfare and welfare governance. Despite the stigmatising connotation attached to the term, colony was freely used by the bureaucrats and frontline agents (as indeed by the activists, journalists, and residents themselves) in the context of welfare and land provisioning.

Apart from the welfare bureaucracy, the Paniyas encounter the state through the forests. The closure of forests to Adivasis is a well-documented phenomenon in India. This is especially so in Wayanad, where the distribution of access rights under the Forest Rights Act has been deficient. Although the Paniyas are not entirely forest-dependent, many Paniya households rely on forest products for alternative income, especially in times of unforeseen events. However,

forests are state property and access to them is highly controlled, often through the use of violence. I got a glimpse of this on New Year's Day of 2018, which I spent in a colony that I call Aripaady. I was here to meet Paniya labourers who had gone to the ginger farms in Karnataka for work. Biju and his two uncles offered to take me to their "secret lake" and celebrate the day there (figure 3.7). The lake was inside the forests. A small gap in the electric fencing between the colony and the forests let us in. The lake and the lakeside were bustling with activity: Paniya children diving into the lake from treetops to collect clams, women washing clothes in one corner and collecting water in another, and cattle immersed in an afternoon dip. The colony's reliance on the forestland unveiled itself before me.



Figure 3.7: Lake near Aripaady colony. Image by the author.

The clams had to fry. A vast open ground with fresh grass was found further inside the forest. While lighting a match, Biju looked visibly nervous. The forest guards could turn up any moment. Biju had been taken away in the past; the marks from the beatings at the forest police station were still fresh on his body and in his mind. The Adiyas, Paniyas, and Kattunaikas were the first to fall under suspicion when forest fires occurred. Access was granted only under the supervision of "forest watchers." Forest watcher was a low-paid position

in the Forest Department filled by Adiya, Paniya, or Kattunaika men who were tasked with surveillance, including over fellow members of their communities. Stuck between the private plots of upper-caste households, resorts, and forests under surveillance, the colonies stood as the residual spaces of a population confined.

The applicability of the Forest Rights Act to the Paniyas has been limited, considering how they were extricated from the forests centuries ago and now lived in colonies that were mostly outside or at the fringes of forests. Activists of the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha pointed out to me that granting access to the forests was possible within the ambit of the law. Even if "individual rights," which recognised the right of a household to hold a piece of forestland, were not recognised, "community rights" that granted access to forest products could be granted under the law. However, winning community rights would need sustained activism to establish that the Paniyas' relationship with the forests came under this set of rights. Currently, there exists neither the political will nor any mass campaign at the grassroots level to make this happen. Only a few Paniya households that happened to live inside the forests applied for rights under the law. In this case, too, no community rights have been granted. In most cases, the size of the land over which an individual right is granted is as small as the floor area of the house, in contrast with the four hectares that are allowed in the law (Sudheesh 2015). In the whole province, only around 500 community rights applications have been passed, almost entirely in the case of the Kadar, a forest-dependent Adivasi community that is dwindling in numbers, in central Kerala.

Recall here that the *Kudilketti Samaram* of 2001 had demanded an end to Adivasi landlessness and the inclusion of all Adivasi land and settlements in the Fifth Schedule of the constitution. Such inclusion would have nominally given the Adivasis some control over their land, notwithstanding the steady erosion of such control in the existing Fifth Schedule areas around the country. On paper, the Fifth Schedule allows for the creation of Tribal Advisory

Councils to "advise on matters pertaining to the welfare and advancement of the Scheduled Tribes." It prohibits the operation of moneylenders and the transfer of land from the Adivasis to others. The governor, the unelected nominee of the central government in a province, holds the power to nullify any law or its parts enacted by the Parliament or a provincial Legislative Assembly if they see that the law will harm the Adivasis in any way.[14] Declaration of an area as "scheduled" would also pave the way for the implementation of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act or PESA of 1998. The law sets up Adivasi *grama sabhas* ("village assemblies") that grant a wide array of rights over development planning and resource use.

The governments in Kerala have appointed various commissions over the years to study the possibility of bringing the province's Adivasi colonies, which are geographically scattered, under the Fifth Schedule. In 2015, the provincial government submitted a report to the President of India on the status of the Scheduled Tribes, promising the implementation of Scheduled Areas and PESA. A list of 2,445 colonies was also included in the report, to be brought under the above laws. When a question was raised in the Kerala Legislative Assembly regarding the report in March 2017, the government answered merely that the boundaries of these settlements were not clear. Way back in 1961, the provincial government had reported to the Dhebar Commission, appointed by the central government to study the status of the Scheduled Tribes, that 2,755.7 sq. km. of land could be declared as Scheduled Areas in the province. However, the provincial government instead chose to implement the 1975 law on the restoration of alienated lands, as this was permitted by the commission. As described above this law was repealed in 1999. In 2004, another commission appointed by the central government – the Bhuria Commission – asked the provinces at what level of local government they found the implementation of Scheduled Areas appropriate. The Kerala government responded that it considered the *grama panchayath* the appropriate level, indirectly indicating

[14] The governors hardly ever utilise this power.

its awareness of the demand for such areas. The demand was further reiterated by the *Nilpu Samaram* of 2014 as mentioned before. These delays meant that a crucial means to wipe out the Adivasi *jaathicolonies* slipped out of the state's hands.

Lack of clarity over the title documents of the colonies is, unsurprisingly, another feature marking these spaces. Many Paniya colonies that I visited in the Kannur district stood on private plots of landowning Nair households. The Paniya households lived in the hope that they would not be asked to leave. Years of supplying labour to the landowning households meant that the Paniya colonies were tolerated, but with increasing land prices and the landowners' need for partitioning the properties for the next generation, the colony residents knew that their future was uncertain.

Geetha's natal home had a telling experience. It stood alone, next to a bus stop, right on the edge of the road. I had passed by this house many times, so I was surprised when Geetha told me that that was where she was born. In conversations overheard while waiting for buses, I had heard many people referring to this house as a colony, as if it were an entire congested settlement. These instances instantly brought out the stigma attached to the term and to the Paniyas. Geetha's grandparents had worked for a landowning Mappila household and had received only grains in wages. Eventually, they were given two cents of land to put up a dwelling, along with a title document. Years later, during a fire, the residents of the house gave the document to the landowning household, now in the next generation, to keep it safe. The latter destroyed the document. Ever since they have claimed the land as theirs. There were 12 members living in that two-room house now, after three generations. The house was crumbling. After two years of struggling, Geetha managed to find a copy of the title in the village office (the lowest-level office of the Revenue Department). Settlement of the dispute and retrieval of the original title were still much further away.

Implicit in all these vignettes are the disparate daily struggles of the Paniyas that sprout from the spatiality of the colonies. The vignettes equip us to enquire into the notion of territory as it applies to the Paniyas. Territory can be understood as a "bounded part of the earth that is claimed by social groups with economic, social, and cultural links attached to it" (Rogers, Castree, and Kitchin 2013). Several aspects of territory can be teased out from this articulation. Firstly, the articulation evokes a strong connotation of a continuous piece of land – "a bounded part of the earth." The dispersed nature of the Paniya colonies, in conjunction with their partial dependence on the forests, brings out how establishing Paniya territories can be a complex issue. Although the Paniya respondents vociferously stated to me that Wayanad belonged to the Adivasis, identifying the exact territories of the Paniyas within the district turned out to be a challenging task in the conversations. Secondly, "the economic, social, and cultural links" attached to territory bring out how meanings of the means of livelihood, social status, autonomy, and identity overlap in the notion of territory; it is not merely the control over an area. The dream of the Muthanga protesters to establish an "Adivasi republic" in the land they occupied in 2003 should be read in this context. The idea was not merely the reconstruction of a tale of the noble savage that lived an autonomous life in the past by the social movement leaders (in this case, the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha) (Steur 2016), but an interpretation of the distant past of relatively free access to the land and forests as representing autonomy.

This hints at the idea of territory as a thoroughly political phenomenon – whether it be its construction, control, transgression, or use for resistance (Storey 2001). The political construction of territory provides a more nuanced picture of the concept than the rigid identification with a bounded piece of the earth. The debate over the declaration of Scheduled Areas in Kerala can be seen as a tussle over the political construction of territory, wherein the meaning of territory remains contested. It also shows that territories need not actually be created on the ground to become attached to social identity. As Hall (2013) points out, the

aspiration for territory is as much a feature of the politics of territory as the actual control over it. A community may feel a deep connection with a piece of the earth without having any political control over it. Furthermore, territory, as a signifier of social power, is also the power to inscribe meanings on land (Delaney 2005). In this sense, the social movements' demands for the declaration of Scheduled Areas can be seen as an attempt to inscribe the meanings of belongingness and identity on the land in Wayanad. The ordinary Paniyas who I spoke to had shared this idea, even when they struggled to point out the boundaries of the territory that the idea referred to and confined their most immediate demand to one acre of land with a title.

Before ending this section, I make a short detour to compare and contrast the insights on the Adivasi colonies presented above with the scholarships on Dalit and Adivasi settlements elsewhere in India. Historical and spatial expulsion, the lived experience of caste in intimate settings of close proximity to upper-caste households, the resultant humiliation, as well as, in many instances, shared histories of agricultural bonded labour and the experience of being rendered surplus populations in the capitalist growth trajectory of the country allow us to take up this comparison. Firstly, the Paniya colonies show how settlements that house a surplus population are not merely the products of caste-based ostracism from a bygone era; these settlements are actively being reproduced through the non-distribution or minimal distribution of land. These stand in contrast to the colonies of the Halipati Adivasi community of Gujarat, where colonies represent the makeshift dwellings that the "footloose" Halipatis erected while in transit, waiting for work (Breman 2016). Welfare measures and participation in labour unions and Adivasi social movements have made staying put the better option for the Paniyas in comparison with becoming migrant labourers, but with the implication that the colonies have become a unit of welfare governance. Projects of the Government of Kerala, such as the Ambedkar Settlement Scheme, seek to renovate the current houses and sanitation facilities in

the Adivasi colonies. The result is that many of them get a facelift, while the issue of landlessness remains intact.

Secondly, as in the case of Dalit settlements, Adivasi colonies have emerged as sites of resistance. The political importance of the Dalit settlements is well-noted in the scholarship. For instance, Rawat (2013) notes that the *jati muhallas* ("caste streets") of Dalits across the country have been central to their rise as a political force. Jaoul (2012) describes how Dalit *bastis* ("settlements") in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, became the incubators for the rise of the Dalit-led Bahujan Samaj Party ("party for the *bahujan*"; *bahujan*, roughly multitude, is an umbrella term for the so-called backward castes and contextually, religious minorities). In a similar vein, Gorringe (2016) describes how the Dalit *cheris* ("settlements"; approximates the term slums) of Tamil Nadu are serving as the nodes for the rise of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi ("liberation panthers party"). Rao (2009) notes that contestations over space – of schools and hospitals – have been central to Dalit mobilisation in Maharashtra. In all these instances, as in Wayanad, the spaces that the Dalits and Adivasis have been confined to expose how meaning-making on space depends essentially on power relations (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 11); subverting the "meanings" of stigma and dirt attached to the space of the settlements will need persistent contestation. The Adivasi resistance movements in Kerala make it clear that state efforts to reduce landfare from being a means of providing social and political control over land into a means of merely aiding the reproduction of labour power or providing a temporary cushion from the onslaught of capitalist markets will not be acceptable.

Lived Spaces

The everyday life in the colony brings out the complexities and violence of caste in Wayanad. The low position that is accorded to the Paniyas in the caste hierarchy is embedded in a process of reproduction on an everyday basis through these lived experiences. A series of vignettes are taken up in this section to elaborate on this point.

For Geetha, work provided by the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), served not only as a safety net but also as the only livelihood that helped her feed her three children. Work in the paddy farms had almost disappeared. She once tried sharecropping on leased land, but it ended in failure. At the *oorukoottam* where I met her, one of the major issues raised was the NREGA. Hosted by the *anganavadi*, the *oorukoottam* began when a *grama panchayath* member, an elected representative of the local body, arrived. The oldest man in the assembly was asked to take the position of the *mooppan*, the chief, in a shoddy replication of the traditional chieftaincy in Adivasi communities.[15] The *anganavadi* toddlers had made space for the assembly and quietly watched decentralised democratic governance unfold before their eyes. I was asked to take the third seat, next to the member and the *mooppan*, as a guest. Noticing that the *anganavadi* helper, in charge of writing down notes on the meeting, was doing so only when the member spoke and not when the Paniya women assembled there did, I resigned myself to my field notebook.

Geetha was vocal at the meeting. She firmly demanded that a separate list of Scheduled Tribe participants for NREGA work be brought out since they were not able to finish the work allotted. I wondered what that meant. In one of my several visits to her colony, she explained the matter. Work was allotted to *ayalkoottams* ("neighbourhood groups"), containing 10 to 20 women. The neighbourhood groups in a *panchayath ward* formed the Area Development Society (ADS). The ADS president and secretary controlled the list of participants and the allocation of work. Although separate lists could be constituted for the Scheduled Tribes under the provincial NREGA rules, this had not been implemented in Geetha's *ward*. Her neighbourhood group consisted of Paniyas, Kattunaikas, Kurumas, and Syrian Christians. Participants from the latter two affluent communities often moonlighted in work that gave

[15] Different Adivasi communities in Kerala hold different notions of, and have different degrees of allegiances towards, the *mooppan*. The state-sponsored *oorukoottam* is not sensitive to these differences.

higher wages, in addition to claiming the NREGA wages by signing the attendance registers. The Syrian Christian ADS secretary chose not to intervene. While the NREGA wage stood at Rs.263 per day at the time of fieldwork in 2017, picking coffee and splitting areca nuts provided up to Rs.400. Payment of wages under the NREGA was done strictly on the condition of completing the work allotted. This meant that the Paniya and Kattunaika women were forced to complete the workshare of their upper-caste neighbours for fear of losing wages. Most of the public work allotted under the law was actually carried out on private plots that needed fencing or clearing of hedges. When Geetha confronted her upper-caste neighbours, she was derided by them. "Where will you take your people for work? Whose land will colony people work on?" they retorted. "*Kayyokkullavan kaaryakkaaran*!" Might is right, Geetha exclaimed to me. The humiliation contained in the term "colony people" revealed how Geetha's body was inscribed in class and caste: this body could work next to the upper-caste bodies in places like the NREGA work site, but they still belonged to different life worlds.

The colony also travels with the body. On 22 February 2019, Malayalam news channels broke the story of the lynching of Madhu, a 30-year-old man from the Kurumba Adivasi community in Attappady. The Kurumbas are comparable to the Paniyas in terms of the degree of marginalisation. With a history of land alienation to settlers, they are today placed in the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, a sub-group of the Scheduled Tribes that qualifies them for additional welfare schemes but not sub-quotas in the reserved seats in public institutions. Madhu was accused of stealing: his killers found eggs and curry powder on him. They belonged to all different affluent communities – Hindu, Muslim, and Syrian Christian – and had affiliations to all different political parties. Madhu had secluded himself in the forests, coming down to the town only to pick up essential provisions. Locals told me he had faced mental health difficulties. He was tied to a tree before being beaten up and a selfie was posted on social media (figure 3.8).

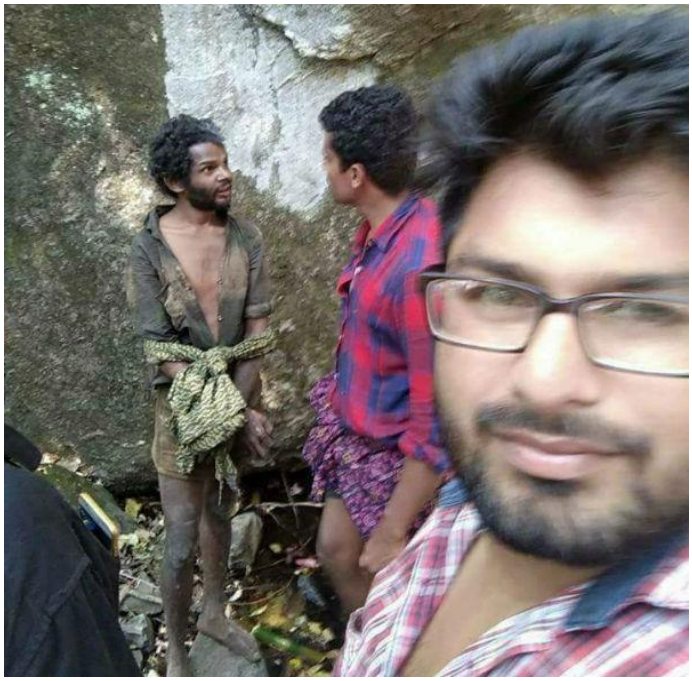


Figure 3.8: Madhu (with tied hands). Picture taken by one of the accused. The court case is still on. Circulated widely in mainstream and social media.

I accompanied the activists of the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha to Attappady to organise a memorial event for Madhu, a week after his death. While distributing leaflets and inviting people of the *oorus* (the local name for Adivasi settlements) for the programme, I noticed that these settlements had been reduced to colonies that resembled those of the Paniyas in Wayanad. In 1975, the residents of the Kurumba *oorus* were granted titles over 2,700 acres of forestland. The government retained the titles and formed a cooperative farming society with the overt aims of preventing alienation of the distributed lands and providing employment to the 420 beneficiary households. Like similar projects in Wayanad, this cooperative venture too ended up in losses under corrupt government-appointed bureaucrats who held decision-making positions. Kurumba residents told me that they felt like they were reduced to "the status of tenants" in their own lands. The project was still operational at the time of fieldwork.

The memorial event was organised in an *ooru* that had some vacant land. I had slept on the same ground the previous night with the two activists and the *mooppan* of the *ooru*, lighting up a fire in the middle to keep the animals away. The three dogs of the *mooppan* kept

me additionally warm. I could see the lights at the end of the colony, coming from the Model Residential School. Referred to as the MRS, these schools were run exclusively for Scheduled Tribe students and provided tuition, boarding, and lodging free of cost. There were 20 such schools in Kerala, including five in Wayanad. I lay there in the *ooru*, staring at the MRS. It stood as a definitive symbol of the welfare generosity of the state, but its position next to these *oorus* with a history of land alienation perplexed me.

In the days that followed, the High Court of Kerala asked the provincial government to submit a written explanation on Madhu's lynching. The governments' note that was submitted by P. Pugazhendi, an officer of the Indian Forestry Services who served as the Director of the Scheduled Tribes Development Department, said that many programmes had been implemented to ensure the *kshemam* (welfare) of the Adivasis in Attappady (Mathrubhumi 2018c).[16] These programmes focused on the needs of land, housing, education, healthcare, and food security of the local Adivasis. It reported that Madhu's family was eligible for several *aanukoolyangal* (benefits), including 35kg of rice provided by the state. It said that Madhu's mother and sister had (contractual) jobs in the state-run *anganavadis* and hence they could not be considered as facing starvation or poverty. The government was aiming to raise the literacy rate from the current 74 percent to 100 percent, the affidavit added. Free medical care was being provided to Madhu in the Government Tribal Speciality Hospital in Attappady, but he failed to turn up for his appointments. The affidavit called Madhu's murder a one-off incident and attributed the reason for the same to "*samoohathile asahishnutha*" ("intolerance in the society").

Madhu's mother was calm when I visited her. There was grief in her eyes, but she spoke to us, with long spells of silence in between. I sat next to her on the steps that led to the verandah

[16] The name of the bureaucrat has appeared in media stories and is, therefore, public information.

of the house. She looked into my eyes and smiled once in a while in between the heavy talk on land alienation and the court case related to Madhu's death. She came to the memorial event and spoke loudly – of land (figure 3.9). The hundreds of people from the Irula, Muduga, and Kurumba Adivasi communities who had assembled there did not express shock at Madhu's murder.[17] They demanded justice in the form of land. As Guru (2009, 56) notes, "humiliation looks endemic when understood from the structural point of view. It is going to be there as long as structures that underlie and renew the need for inequality and subordination/servility exist." The people who assembled in the programme vocally pointed out that landlessness was the underlying reason for the humiliation meted out to them. Madhu's death sparked many other, short-lived land struggles across Kerala, including those of the Paniyas (figure 3.10).



Figure 3.9: Remembrance ceremony for Madhu. Madhu's mother is in the front row. Image shared by Sumo Praveen.

[17] Each of these three communities has a story of land alienation to speak of that is beyond the scope of this chapter.



Figure 3.10: A Paniya land struggle in Kannur district in February 2018. The participants demanded titles for lands they had been living on for 25 years. They tied their hands and pleaded they should not be treated like Madhu. Source: Mathrubhumi newspaper, 27 February 2018.

Pugazhendi, who presented the government's view on Madhu's death, and the Adivasi people of Attappady present contrasting takes on Madhu's death. Welfare was enough in the former's perspective; it was not in the latter's. Landfare was underway in the former's perspective: there were programmes like the cooperative society described above. Landfare was far from being substantive in the latter's perspective. Madhu's family was "employed" in the former perspective. In the latter's, Attappady's Adivasis felt like "tenants" on their own land. "Intolerance" explained the killing in the former perspective; the latter pointed at caste. The vision of a good life was represented by 100 percent literacy in the former perspective, autonomy – i.e. social and political control over land – in the latter.

A further telling instance of the lived experience of the colonies is provided by C.K., Janu, the Adivasi leader. In her biography, Janu links her political consciousness to the lived experience of the colonies and observes:

> All development projects emphasise profits for civil society. That is why they build shiny roads to colonies that do not even have a bicycle. They are made for the bank vans that come to recover loans. There are several such places, like Appappara. Projects are designed in our name

> for people in the surrounding areas with land, homes, and skies of their own. There is no purpose in building roads for settlements that do not have proper courtyards to enjoy the breeze or closed spaces for the people to relieve themselves. That is how the roads were turned into public toilets. That is how we came to be called unclean people (Bhaskaran 2004, 50).

"Development projects," even when they are implemented with the overt aim of benefitting the colonies, only serve those with "land, home, and skies." Janu's words bring out how these welfare projects do not make sense for landless households that do not have even toilets or space to "enjoy the breeze." We begin to see in these words an early indication of the life that the state imagines for the landless Adivasis. Merely building "shiny roads" to the colonies, rather than wiping out the colonies. Raising the colonies to the standard of the upper-caste neighbourhoods – not by providing land but by targeting the colonies with "development" projects, in order to govern the aesthetics of how this surplus population lives beside those already with land, home, and skies. Janu notes that "colonies are also the colonies of civil society" (*ibid.,* page 50), likening the Adivasi settlements to colonial possessions.

The welfare generosity of the state, with its targets of raising literacy levels or improving educational status through regular and residential schools, should ideally be welcome. However, these programmes too are far removed from the Adivasi life world, as Janu points out:

> Every summer, buses from big schools arrive to pick up our impoverished children. They are, without any remorse, turned into sinners in the confines of the student hostels. They return as people who have lost their minds, as the poorest of the poor. Some get lost in the city nights. They become the content of films or statistics. Real colonies are created that way (*ibid*., 51).

Janu's words bring out how educational institutions simply serve to prepare landless Adivasi students for the reproduction of their labour power at best or become "people who have lost their minds" at worst. The curricula are devoid of any content familiar to the students from the

colonies, which, in conjunction with overt and covert humiliation, force them to drop out in large numbers. Thus, education never becomes a means through which ownership or the gaining of control over land can take place. The injection of welfare, far from soothing the effect of landlessness, comes out instead as a repressive force.

For Janu, the lack of space in colonies meant that the residents could not breathe or talk, leading to fights within families, suicides, and alcoholism. “Every question finally leads to the answer called land,” Janu observes (Nissar 2018, 25). A turning point in her life was her stay in a Paniya colony in Wayanad called Kolikkampaadi in 1989. Twenty six families stayed here in three shacks. Janu and her companions had to spend the night in one of the shacks crouching; there was no space to lie down and sleep. The families living there had done it for years. Janu led her first land struggle immediately after this experience, stepping into a site with state-owned land and demanding redistribution. Ten families received an acre each; they transferred half the lands to another ten. In 1995, she led another land struggle in Panavally, also in Wayanad, and receive land for herself and 51 other families.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to bring out how the Paniyas became a surplus population of labourers pushed into perpetual struggles for survival: the ground was prepared long before capitalist relations fully strengthened in Wayanad, through the gradual loss of access to land and forests over centuries. Rather than sudden, interruptive dispossession from land on which settled farming was practised, the Paniyas were reduced to the colonies over waves of settlement and the arrival of the colonial government. As Wayanad moved from precapitalist to capitalist relations, the Paniya settlements transformed from the *paadis* to the colonies.

The chapter brought out how the lived experience of the colonies sparked land struggles. The spatiality of the colonies and the resultant intimate interactions with upper-caste

neighbours were seen to be as much a part of the reasons that triggered these struggles as their status of being labour reserves. Going over the landmark land struggles as well as the short-lived, scattered land struggles and everyday negotiations with landlessness, the chapter attempted to establish early on in the thesis that resistance is important to the story and that scattered struggles are as insightful as large, organised movements for land.

The chapter presented glimpses of the tensions between landfare and welfare. Geetha's navigation of NREGA work, discourses around Madhu's death, and Janu's take on shiny roads to the colonies were a few examples where the welfare generosity and the landfare frugality of the state did not sit well together. Early indications of how the state imagined Adivasi life were also provided by the chapter: colonies became governance units for welfare provision to this section of the surplus population and they were kept in place through welfare injection, facelift projects, and non-distribution of land, in addition to the denial of Scheduled Area status. The state's imagination of Adivasi life will be developed in the later chapters.

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In a repeat field visit in 2019, I checked back with Geetha. Her husband had told her he could no longer take care of the family as he was unable to find work and he turned to alcohol. Geetha thus left her shack. She now lived in another colony in a relative's house that was still under construction. During one of our conversations related to the arrangement of funds for her, she said, "I could have grown at least a chilli plant for food if I had land."

Janu continued to live in the land she received through the struggle, farming black pepper, and looking forward to an agrarian future.

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4 | Janu's Pepper, Balan's Tapioca

Wayanad was stirred up when I started my fieldwork in 2017, not just because of the monsoons. C.K. Janu, the firebrand leader of the Adivasis, had bought a car. A photograph of hers holding the steering wheel had come out in the latest issue of the Mathrubhumi Weekly and was circulating rapidly, offline and online (figure 4.1). Tea shops, WhatsApp groups, and Facebook posts became battlegrounds with shouts such as "Janu has abandoned the Adivasi way of life; Janu has betrayed the Adivasis; Janu disappoints again after allying with the BJP."[18] The battle – seemingly on Adivasi authenticity – was for me linked to the agrarian future that Janu saw in land.



Figure 4.1: Janu in her car and her pepper grove. *Source: Mathrubhumi Weekly ©Thaha Madayi*

[18] Citing the failure of the LDF and the UDF in addressing Adivasi landlessness, Janu floated her own political party, the Janadhipathya Rashtriya Sabha ("democratic political assembly"), in the run up to the 2016 national-level election. The party entered an alliance with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party ("Indian people's party") or BJP. This caused a split in the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha, the movement she had helped found in 2001. The breakaway group, under the leadership of M. Geethanandan, also uses the name Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha. My interactions were mainly with this group. Janu quit the alliance with the NDA in 2018 and joined again in 2021.

"Why can't the Adivasi own a car?" Janu retorted in a television interview, interrogating mainstream Kerala society's stereotypes about landless Adivasis living in squalor. She explained that the money came from the pepper she had planted in the one-acre plot that she had received through her land struggle in the 1990s. Pepper had attracted a boom price of Rs.700 per kilogram in the previous year and provided half the money she needed. The other half came through a bank loan that she was confident of repaying. Janu stated assertively, "My story proves how Adivasis can improve their lives if they become owners of cultivable land." During my previous fieldwork in 2012, Janu had told me that if every Adivasi household was given an acre of land, they could resolve the food crisis of Kerala, a province that produces less than one-fifth of its staple food, rice.

On a hot afternoon when the monsoon had receded, I walked up to Aripaady colony to meet Balan, who had recently received an acre of land as a beneficiary of the land distribution scheme for Muthanga struggle participants. Although the news of land distribution had come 15 years after the struggle, Balan was not disappointed. He did sundry work. There was no work that day. In my second visit, I found him away for the day, painting the walls of newly constructed buildings. The third time he was away in the forests with his wife for a week-long trip to collect *noonji*, a snail that is part of the Paniya diet. The uncertainty in work opportunities meant that he was happy with the hilly land received. "What do you want to grow there, *Baletta*?" I asked out of curiosity. Balan already had a detailed plan in mind: he would take six months to clear the land and become a small farmer growing cassava with family labour.

"But what will they do with the land in these times of agrarian crisis? Is land the way to go?" asked Sujith, a Communist friend equally interested in Adivasi land rights, in one of our several research-related conversations. Sujith's reference was to the falling viability of farming in Kerala. The easy answers could have been that this was a matter of social justice, that Adivasi landlessness exemplified the failure of the so-called Kerala model of development,

that land could be used as an asset, if not for farming. However, two strands of interactions with my interlocutors showed me that agrarian changes, which I unpack shortly, were a real factor to be considered in Adivasi land politics. The first was with Paniya men and women who owned a few cents of land but were unable to use it as collateral to seek loans from banks or sell the land because of laws that prohibit such use.[19] The second set of interactions was with landed farmers from all different communities, including the landed Kuruma Adivasi community, who I met across Wayanad. These farmers expressed their inability to hold on to farming. Their perspectives corroborated a vast literature already present on Kerala's bleak agrarian future (elaborated below). In combination, this shows that while the Paniyas would be confined to farming as the main use to which they can employ any land they receive, they would be facing the agrarian crisis that loomed large in the province. Social movements, meanwhile, have firmly asked for cultivable land, as indicated in the previous chapter.

The agrarian futures that Janu and Balan see in land are located against the backdrop of the coexistence of two realities in many parts of the world: the falling viability of smallholder farming and demands for cultivable land by the landless. For instance, drawing on an extensive survey of land-use changes in Southeast Asia, Hall, Hirsch, and Li (2011, 1) point out that:

> Arguments about deagrarianisation *sit awkwardly* alongside popular mobilisation under a range of banners (those of the poor, the citizen, the political party, the peasant, the ethnic, or

[19] The Kerala Assignment of Government Land to the Scheduled Tribes Rules of 2001 allow inheritance but prohibit alienation of the land distributed. Alienation is defined as sale, donation, or leasing out. The rules permit the use of the land as collateral to avail a loan for agricultural purposes from a public-sector bank or any other recognised government agency. However, my interlocutors asserted that this was not possible in practice, since financial institutions frowned upon the non-attachable lands given to Adivasis. Li (2010) notes that prohibitions on indigenous peoples' lands exist around the world and argues that they signal the problematic assumption that indigenous peoples need to be protected from predatory land deals. Note that these prohibitions are distinct from embargoes with a fixed time-frame that are commonly placed on land distributed by the state. The Kerala Land Assignment Act 1960, for instance, places an embargo of 25 years on alienation.

indigenous group) for access to land as a productive resource, as a backstop for precarious livelihoods, and as a symbol of identity and belonging (italics mine).

This chapter is an attempt to understand why the two realities sit awkwardly alongside each other when scrutinised from the perspective of the claims for cultivable land by the Paniyas. The chapter locates these claims in the context of agrarian changes underway in Wayanad and throws open the conundrum that emerges. The conundrum is circular (figure 4.2): the historical injustice of landlessness and the lived experience of the colonies trigger demands for cultivable land. However, cultivable land appears to have a bleak future in the context of agrarian changes underway in Wayanad. At the same time, these agrarian changes produce multidirectional expulsions from livelihoods that add to the historical injustices. Since the livelihood expulsions and historical injustices are rooted in landlessness, the Paniyas claim land. Agrarian uncertainties, however, remain a question mark.

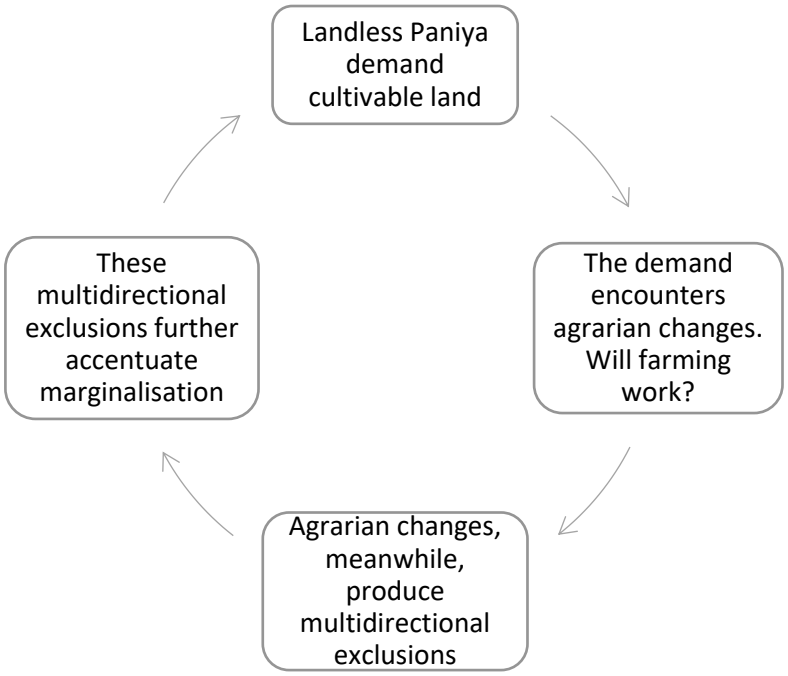


Figure 4.2: Circular conundrum of land claims in times of agrarian changes

This chapter does not seek to find a way out of this conundrum. Instead, it argues that there is value in grappling with this phenomenon underway in the underbelly of the rural landscape. The chapter demonstrates how the Paniyas face multidirectional, simultaneous livelihood expulsions that are linked to the local growth trajectory and agrarian changes. These expulsions place the Paniyas in an "in-between" position as described in Chapter 1, wherein their wage labour is becoming less and less relevant to the local growth path while still being embedded in larger capitalist relations. While they face spells of unemployment that are longer than those faced by circular migrant labourers elsewhere in India, they are not completely disconnected from capitalist relations.

The rest of the present chapter is organised as follows: I first elaborate on the agrarian changes underway in Wayanad and in the wider region of Kerala. This section brings out how the capitalist takeover of the countryside in myriad, subtle ways – without any big capital attack – shapes the context in which land claims are being made. This is followed by an examination of where the Paniyas' land claims are situated in the larger context of agrarian changes underway in the country. I then present empirical evidence for multidirectional expulsions experienced by the Paniyas from livelihood sectors in the midst of these agrarian changes and make the case that these expulsions further their historical marginalisation. By locating the land claims in the past- and present expulsions produced by agrarian changes, I obviate any suggestion that the Paniyas are under any false consciousness while demanding land. Further, while raising the question of the relevance of land claims in times of agrarian changes, this chapter does not subscribe to a linear model of progress that predicts the complete disappearance of smallholder agriculture. It merely aims to contextualise how land claims can be comprehended under conditions of agrarian changes currently underway in the local context.

Agrarian "Crisis" v. Agrarian "Change"

Kerala is moving out of farming. To give an indication, the contribution of agriculture to the Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) fell from 22 percent in 2000 to a mere 10 percent in 2016 (Harilal and Eswaran 2017). The corresponding figure was 15 percent at the national level. Agriculture employs only 16.7 percent of the workforce, against the 41.8 percent at the national level (GoK 2019b). Wayanad still has the highest share of agricultural labourers (29.88 percent) among all districts (Census 2011b). 61.4 percent of the category "Scheduled Tribe (ST) workers" in the district were reported to be agricultural labourers (*not* including the 6.7 percent of cultivators among ST workers) (Census 2011a). Most of my Paniya respondents, who were already landless, were shuttling between odd jobs – from agricultural labour to construction work. As such, they constitute various "classes of labour," the term used by Bernstein (2010) to refer to the labourers who eke out a living from not one, but multiple ("fragmented") sources of livelihood.

In order to elaborate on the transformations underway in the Wayanadan landscape, I disentangle two narratives in the scholarship on agrarian Kerala: one that sees the transformations as "agrarian crisis" and the other that looks at them as "agrarian change." I thereby show how these two versions of the same phenomenon let us into the slow, stealthy, and often intangible ways in which capital effects structural changes in the economy as well as land-use changes in the geography of a place.

The importance of agriculture to Wayanad can be gauged from its etymology, which is often explained using the expanded name *vayalnadu,* meaning the land of paddy fields. Of late the district has been in news for a series of farmer suicides triggered by losses in the farm sector (Badami 2014, George and Krishnaprasad 2006, Münster 2012). The declining viability of agriculture in Kerala is referred to as a *prathisandhi* (crisis). Paddy, the crop which has defined

the labour history of the Adiya community of Janu and the Paniya community of Balan, is now fast disappearing. The district's paddy area in 2011-12 fell to a third of what it was in 1982-83 (GoK 2016). In the past three decades, Kerala has lost paddy at the rate of 20,000 hectares per year (Harilal and Eswaran 2017). As noted above, Kerala produces only one-fifth of its staple food – rice (GoK 2016). Acreage and production of pepper and cassava have also been in constant decline. Pepper prices currently stand at around Rs.350 per kilogram, half of what Janu earned during the fieldwork year. Pepper prices have been volatile, sensitive to the local agrarian crisis as well as supplies coming in from other markets, notably Vietnam (Raman 2018). The main reasons for the crisis emerging from empirical studies are the high cost of cultivation, a scarcity of labour, high wages, and volatile prices (Jose and Padmanabhan 2016, Kannan and Pushpangadan 1989, Kannan 1988, Kannan and Pushpangadan 1990). The provincial government's long term vision towards addressing the crisis has been ambiguous. The Paddy Land and Wetland Conservation Act 2008 has been systematically diluted to allow the conversion of paddy fields for construction purposes. Although a new Special Agricultural Zone policy has been devised, it restricts farm rejuvenation efforts to select locations.

The falling contribution of agriculture to the NSDP is characteristic of most provinces in India. However, the reasons behind Kerala's structural transformation are rooted in the specific ways in which capitalism has unfolded in the province. Harilal and Eswaran (2017) note that the decline of paddy farming in the province started soon after the land reforms that led to the fragmentation of landholdings. The authors find that the root cause of the dismal condition of agriculture in the province is not *scarcity* of land, labour, fertile soil, or information. Instead, *preferences* have changed, such that land, labour, and capital are moving away from agriculture. The authors characterise the "dilution, scattering, and desertion" of capital from agriculture as "deaccumulation" (*ibid.*, page 7). Balakrishnan (1999) provides an explanation that diverges from arguments foregrounding the impact of the land reforms and

argues that the main trigger for the move away from the primary sector has been the emigration from Kerala to the Middle East that brought new capital to the province and increased the pressure on land for real estate and non-farm enterprises.

These perspectives give an early indication of the "agrarian changes" underway in the Wayanadan landscape – long term, yet subtle transformations shaped by myriad, amorphous circuits of capital. Münster and Münster (2012) point out three such changes spurred on by deagrarianisation – tourism, closure of forests in the name of conservation, and speculative ginger farming. Balan's *grama panchayath* had 44 tourist resorts, with each built on a minimum sprawl of two acres. A large number of "homestays" dot this panchayat and the rest of the district. Closely related to this is the closure of forests for conservation, which then becomes an opening for nature tourism. A further development is speculative ginger farming by farmers from Wayanad in leased lands in the neighbouring province of Karnataka. Farmers quitting paddy started to take lands for lease – from 10 to 100 acres – taking advantage of the cheap and abundant availability of land in interior Karnataka. Ginger attracts a boom price once in a while and can be kept under soil for months, leading to long periods of speculation (more below and in the next chapter). Ginger has produced the lucky rich as well as the unlucky poor; the latter category includes many who took their own lives following losses. Meanwhile, the paddy fields that are left in Wayanad are themselves undergoing transformation, first to banana gardens, followed by areca trees, and finally real estate (Fox et al. 2017, Guillerme et al. 2011, Jose and Padmanabhan 2016).

Thus, Balan's plans to plant tapioca and become a smallholder farmer and Janu's confidence in pepper and progress stand in the middle of these larger trends of agrarian changes. Since the landless Adivasis in Wayanad live in colonies that are interspersed between plots owned by other communities, they are directly exposed to these larger changes, especially when the landowners quit farming.

Land, Culture, and Productive Asset

While raising the issue of agrarian crisis and its implications for Adivasi demands for cultivable land in Kerala, one often encounters the comment that land is not just a productive asset, that it has cultural value linked to the Adivasis' "bonds" with nature, and a symbolic value linked to social status. This section addresses this issue head on.

How meaningful land ownership is related to the ability to use land for subsistence-level farming is already palpable in the perspectives of Janu and Balan, and of Geetha from the previous chapter. The example of the Chengara struggle participants being forced to abandon the plots provided to them by the state, upon finding them uncultivable, attests to this fact (as described in the previous chapter, Chengara saw a major land struggle in 2007). Thus, landless Adivasis are already countering any essentialisation of their relationship with nature or a purely symbolic vision of social status as landowners that is extricated from the productive function of land. The shift of state- and social-movement narratives from the *restoration* of age-old rights over land to the distribution of *alternative* land (one to five acres) through the 1999 Act on land distribution has limited any discussion on an expanded notion of access rights for the Adivasis over nature. Further, since land owned by the Adivasis or distributed by the state to the Adivasis is non-saleable by law, and cannot be used as collateral for bank loans, the land in their possession has limits on its productive uses. These factors foreground the importance of productivity and cultivability. Intriguingly in the case of Adivasi social movements, such as the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha, even as they foreground the Adivasi identity, criticise the left's class framework, and elevate this criticism to pointing out flaws in Marxism, they are still asking for land as a productive asset. This demand demonstrates how the social movements too recognise the integral importance of land's productive function to the political identity of landless Adivasis.

In arguments for and against land redistribution, social justice and productivity have loomed large as two competing concerns (Bernstein 2003). With regard to social justice, provision of land has been argued as an imperative in itself, regardless of whether the small farms thus generated are economically viable. With regard to productivity, the question "how viable small farms are" has been thoroughly debated. As Cousins and Scoones (2010) show, "viability" is a contested term with multiple meanings, and all too often, narrow neoclassical and technocratic definitions can override other meanings. In Wayanad, I find that productivity is a key concern as much as the social justice concerns of addressing historical landlessness and recent exclusions. Productivity is understood here in very basic terms as the ability to produce enough per acre to better one's living conditions beyond survival. This is seen as integral to ensuring that the land distribution initiative is just. This is not a naïve conflation of the land reform and the agrarian reform questions (Ferguson 2013), but an honest enquiry of the clashes that emerge between claiming land (under banners of identity and livelihood security) and agrarian realities encountered after receiving land. In a similar vein, Du Toit (2018) demonstrates in the case of South Africa that the argument for land reform, premised on the seizure of landholdings from white owners, is divorced by the state agencies from the agenda of agrarian reform, leading to a lack of clarity regarding what the actual purpose of land reforms is. These questions of social justice and productivity, similarly to those of claims for cultivable land and deagrarianisation, could be visualized as constantly tussling and interacting to shape the lives of landless Adivasis in Kerala.

Multi-directional Expulsions

The picture I paint of the Paniyas' land claims in times of agrarian crisis might be a discouraging one. I move forward to next explore what sustains the Adivasi claims for land despite this sobering context. Why do they not move out beyond land claims, which, considering the agrarian changes, would seem to be the "rational" choice to make? Initially, I

received vague replies from my interlocutors, pushing me to scratch beneath what was most visible. Piecing together scattered stories of the Paniyas negotiating landlessness and agrarian changes brought out some answers before me, though they were only partial.

This section aims to demonstrate the following: (1) Livelihood expulsions are being produced in the context of agrarian changes in Wayanad from multiple directions simultaneously that place the Paniyas in a condition of extreme precarity, (2) These agrarian changes demonstrate how the slow takeover of the countryside by capital impacts Paniya livelihoods, and (3) These expulsions demonstrate how the Paniyas' wage labour is becoming less relevant to the local growth trajectory. The fieldwork brought out expulsions underway in seven different livelihood sectors: paddy farming, speculative ginger farming, construction, public work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), forests, reserved jobs, and redistributed land. It is often the same household that is expelled from multiple livelihoods (Sudheesh 2019).

Pushed Out of Paddy: Pragmatic Hierarchies

Paddy is a signifier of the slave past of the Paniyas. I first met Gopi, a Paniya labourer, when I came to interview Bhaskaran, a retired Forest Department official. Bhaskaran received a pension from the department, apart from the occasional earnings from the areca nut trees on his farm. He owned two acres of farmland and belonged to the Wayanadan Chetty community (listed as an Other Backward Class or OBC). Gopi's colony, quite expectedly, was at the fringes of Bhaskaran's farms. The colony had about 10 houses stacked next to each other in 15 cents of land. Bhaskaran was slowly quitting farming. When I visited, *vayalkrishi* (paddy fields) were already turning into *karakrishi* (home gardens) of ginger and areca. His two sons were well-placed in government jobs and the daughter was preparing for the highly competitive Public Services Commission (PSC) examination for jobs in the Kerala government. Bhaskaran

was very clear of the reasons why he was quitting; he enumerated them in one breath: “There is no surety that you will get twelve (thousand) rupees if you put in ten (thousand) rupees. The youngsters are not coming into farming at all. Labour is scarce. In farming, you can’t sow today and reap tomorrow; you have to wait.”

For Gopi, this meant that a ready source of livelihood that his family had had for generations was slipping out of his hands. On Bhaskaran’s farm, he had some surety of finding work. I was once talking to Gopi in his house. The house was newly constructed but visibly left incomplete as funds got exhausted in the *grama panchayath*. Bhaskaran joined us and sat on a chair next to ours. The conversation was on ginger farming in Karnataka and how two young men from the colony were in police custody over there because of a feud that took place at the site they went to for work. It struck me that Bhaskaran and Gopi sat next to each other with ease and Gopi addressed Bhaskaran as *ettan* (brother). The old hierarchies gave the appearance of melting away. When I got a moment with Gopi, I tried to ask him what he thought of his circumstances. Gopi replied, “We keep working. One *pani* (work) per week, that is all I get. Others have land to farm. We have small pieces of land where our children build houses. There was only one house here. Now there are 8-10.” It started to become clear that Gopi was well aware of the social hierarchies that placed him in a position of insecurity. The semblance of equality in the interactions between Gopi and Bhaskaran had not weathered the underlying inequalities. I asked him if he had thought of alternative ways of finding work. He said:

> Some people say that we should take land for lease and farm. If we do that, we will have to pay for it. If rot or disease occurs, all the investment will be gone. These people (Bhaskaran/upper castes) have money; they have the land. Even if they incur losses in paddy, they can make up for it through other means like pepper or coffee. Our *vibhagam* (community) does not have that. We have no savings either.

It slowly emerged that Gopi was pragmatically sticking to Bhaskaran because there was simply no other work available. Gopi hoped to do whatever sundry work was available on the farm – from clearing weeds to picking areca. The proximity and years of loyalty meant that Bhaskaran still called Gopi and his younger brother for work. The brother was a graduate in economics but he attended to Bhaskaran's cattle. He was trying to clear the PSC exam but had not made it yet. Picherit (2018) refers to the ties that young Dalit labourers maintain with landlords in the wake of insecure alternative livelihoods as "pragmatic bonds." Gopi's case was a bit more desperate since alternative work was scarce. Until his brother found a *joli* (job), both of them had to pragmatically hold on to *pani* (labour) in Bhaskaran's farms. The vignette presents a miniature view of the impact of capitalist agrarian changes in Kerala – paddy is where capital was moving out, a scenario that meant livelihood insecurity for Gopi. This compounds the already existing uncertainty caused by landlessness. Welfare programmes have been insufficient in Gopi's case to overcome this precarity. Though Gopi still demands the market wage, thanks to Kerala's trade unionism, he is still not able to be as free as "free labour" under capitalist relations would imply.

Pushed Out of Ginger

It has been four years since Gopi stopped going to Karnataka for work in the ginger farms. Paniya colonies had provided labour to farmers (upper-caste Hindus, Syrian Christians as well as Muslims) quitting farming in Wayanad and investing in speculative ginger farming in Karnataka. Old bonds between the colonies and these landlords made the Paniya colonies a ready source of labour when the ginger trend started in the 1990s. During my previous fieldwork in 2012, I had found entire colonies empty as families were away for work in Karnataka. However, as Gopi recounted, local labourers in Karnataka have replaced the Paniyas in these farms now. His nephews still managed to find work in watering the ginger, and not the usual planting and harvesting work. Watering was not yet automated because the

supply of electricity was intermittent. This could change anytime, however. Gopi admitted that the local labourers did a lot more work than the Paniyas and also asked for much lower wages. While the Paniya would have to be paid Rs.600, my calculations following fieldwork in Karnataka showed that the local labourers earned much less – as meagre as Rs.150 per day. I explore the role of ginger farming in perpetuating the struggles of the Paniyas and its relevance in understanding their land question in further detail in the next chapter.

In the ginger farms, we see again how the Paniyas' wage labour is becoming less relevant. Initially sparked by the agrarian crisis, the ginger farming enterprise has close links to the agrarian changes in Kerala. The profits from the enterprise, too, are reinvested back home in Wayanad. Paniya labour was thoroughly exploited by the sector for close to three decades, marked by many suspicious deaths on the worksites and the spread of alcoholism among the labourers. These points are elaborated on in the next chapter. The expulsion of the Paniyas from the sector demonstrates how they are losing access to an alternative to paddy farming that provided some certainty of work availability, though it was exploitative.

Pushed Out of Concrete

The rest of the men in Gopi's colony found work in construction, a sector that has been in boom in Kerala, as elsewhere in India. Construction has been the main driver of Kerala's structural transformation, contributing 14 percent to the Gross Value Added in 2017-18 (against eight percent nationally) and providing employment to 19 percent of the workforce (against 11.6 percent nationally) (GoK 2019b). Kunjan was a Paniya construction worker who I met in a colony in Sulthan Bathery. Kunjan had left the ginger sector three years ago after work became scarce. He managed to find work in the construction sector through his networks. There was some *puramboke* land (state-owned "wasteland") available next to the colony where he tried to plant bananas, but his efforts were consistently defeated by wildlife. "I can't fence the colony

with my wages. I get Rs.550 a day when there is work. I have to feed a family of four. I also have a bit of alcohol. Some Rs.150 goes into that." Kunjan's concern regarding his expendability from the construction sector comes out as a sigh: "It's all Bengalis now in construction work."

Bengali is a sweeping, often pejorative, term used to refer to labourers from the provinces of Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal, and Assam who migrate to Kerala for work. There is no consensus on their numbers in Kerala; some figures put it at around three million (Nidheesh 2018). The wages earned by migrant labourers in Kerala differ from one corner of the province to another and from sector to sector. In Wayanad's construction sector, they earned Rs.300 to Rs.400 at the time of fieldwork. While Paniya wages were higher and relatively stable, the migrant labourers had highly varying wage rates, allowing the contractors to exploit them cheaply. As Raj (2018) points out in the case of tea plantations in southern Kerala, a large number of these migrant labourers are Adivasis themselves. Their vulnerability as outsiders without labour union membership or social capital renders them extremely vulnerable.

The Paniyas' high wages are rooted in Kerala's history of labour mobilisation. As Prasad-Aleyamma (2017) points out, wages are cultural relations. Trade unions in Kerala are forced by the baggage of their history to seek high wages for Kerala's own labourers; such pressures do not extend to migrant labourers. Further, wages circulate in ways that produce relationships that "both reflect and reinforce hierarchy" (Bolt 2014, 115). In many colonies, Paniya men told me that they could not afford to ask for lower wages, given the cost of running their families. It could very well be that the contractors and investors are happy that the Paniya wages are higher than the migrant wage rates. The lower wages demanded by the migrant labourers provided them with an opportunity to transfer trust from the very familiar Paniya labourer to the unknown migrant labourer. The migrant labourer who toils hard to send money

back home (now given a professional touch by the fancy-new “cash deposit machines” that have sprung up next to the familiar-mundane ATM machines of big banks) is juxtaposed against the Paniya labourer who “does not think about tomorrow” (does not save). For the Paniya colonies, this scenario meant that their labour had become extremely fungible. Their efforts to seek a space in a sector that afforded relatively high wage rates at home in Wayanad were meeting with the experiences of being pushed out. Paniya labourers who were forced to ask for lower wages found that they were not wanted anymore, as migrant labourers were now considered to be more hardworking and did not have to be provided with food. Migrant labourers were replacing the Paniyas even in paddy farming: one farmer belonging to the landowning Kuruma community told me that he preferred migrant labourers as they did not know the *soothrangal* (tricks) of lazing at work. He claimed that Paniya men and women planted rice seedlings at wide gaps to reduce the amount of work; migrant labourers did not know such tricks. To draw on Scott (1985), the Paniyas were seen as equipped with “weapons of the weak” as a people embedded in the history and topography of Wayanad, while migrant labourers were presumed to have no possession of them.

The construction boom – another manifestation of the agrarian changes in Wayanad – earlier provided an alternative to the precarious paddy labour the Paniyas usually do. While increasingly losing this source of employment, land as a fallback option becomes more and more attractive, despite the questionable future of farming. The vignette above also shows how agrarian changes in various parts of the country encounter each other when Adivasis battling livelihood precarity from central and eastern India encounter the Paniyas facing similar struggles in Kerala.

Pushed Out of Public Work

As elsewhere in India, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) has provided a backup option in times of agrarian distress. I follow the argument of Pattenden (2016) that the NREGA should be seen as a social safety net from capitalism and thus constitutive of it. The NREGA has had a significant positive impact on rural wages and political mobilisation of the poor and is therefore an important element in understanding how neoliberal, capitalist development is operating in rural India (Berg et al. 2018, Jenkins and Manor 2017, Roy 2019). Gopi's wife went for NREGA work for a long time, but work had become erratic lately. Gopi observed, "When she gets *pani*, she gets it for 15 days at a stretch. Then there will not be any work for many days." In the previous chapter, we saw Geetha's experience with the NREGA – the Paniyas ended up doing the work of the affluent participants; her efforts to seek separate work allocation were derided by these participants, who mocked her by pointing out that the Paniyas were landless and had no place where they could do the work under the programme. Geetha's efforts to move into more secure work – that of an employment programme protected by law – was thus met with dismissal ridden with casteist undertones.

Roy (2014) suggests that, in his field site of Bihar, the NREGA provides avenues of dignity for labourers, who consciously choose NREGA work over work in the farms of upper-caste landowners, despite the fact that the latter work was available to them and held the possibility of in-kind payments apart from wages. Contrarily, Geetha's instance shows that NREGA work is not altogether devoid of discriminatory practices despite being a universal policy open to all. As a safety net from market relations, to follow Pattenden's argument, the NREGA is implicated in the myriad ways in which agrarian changes are unfolding in the countryside.

Close to Geetha's *grama panchayath*, a different story was unfolding in Sulthan Bathery. Thanks to ginger capital and the location of Sulthan Bathery as the gateway to Kerala from the cities of Bangalore and Mysore, the place has been swiftly urbanising, shedding its rural, paddy-growing village outlook, to become a fast-growing town with malls and apartment complexes. In December 2017, the place was elevated to the status of a municipality. This was the pinnacle of the agrarian transformation of Sulthan Bathery, from the village that it used to be to a modern investment-attracting town. Colonies that fell in the jurisdiction of the new municipality received a livelihood shock since the NREGA, which was applicable only in rural areas, stopped functioning here. The reverberations of Sulthan Bathery's transformation were felt deeply in the colonies by the inhabitants, who had abruptly been pushed out of this important source of livelihood.

Pushed Out of the Forests

Closure of forests carried out with the ostensible purpose of conservation, which Münster and Münster (2012) consider an example of consumption of nature in times of crisis, has pushed out the Paniyas in the remote parts of Wayanad into resettlement sites. An amount of Rs.1 million (roughly £10,000) is awarded to each household by the Forest Department; a part of the amount is taken away for the construction of houses. When I visited Poovayal colony, where Kattunaika and Paniya households had been resettled, they had just planted bananas. Six families from a former colony had been allocated 2.7 acres together in Poovayal. They took only land suitable for crops other than paddy. The coffee planted was left behind by the previous owner of the land. I asked Veliyan, one of the Paniya persons here, how he felt about the move.

> Our children say they want to go back. Only transport was a problem in the previous place. We did not have any other issue – we did not even catch any disease. We still have our deities there.

> We try to go there to offer prayers, but the forest officials stop us. We tried to sneak in during Onam (an annual festival) but were caught.

Kalathingal (2017) records the resettlement of the Adivasis in Wayanad as part of a project to set up tiger reserves in the district.[20] The high compensation that the government is forced to pay after incidents of wildlife attacks is often cited as a reason to set up the reserve. Kalathingal notes that in a study conducted by the Kerala Forest Research Institute in 2008, under the instructions of the National Tiger Conservation Authority, 10,604 people from 110 colonies had to be displaced. The displacement was expected to add 1,700 acres of additional land to the conservation site. The process had already been completed in four colonies and was progressing in five others under what the project called Stage I. The project was officially referred to as *Swayam Sannaddha Punaradhivasam* (voluntary rehabilitation). While I was about to leave Veliyan's colony, he stopped me and whispered how the process unfolded in his case: "We never asked for relocation. The Chettys went to the Forest Department and said that they were ready for relocation. We too had to come as there was no point living there alone without the Chettys." Veliyan's reference here is to work in the Wayanadan Chettys' farms. Quite similar to Gopi's story of sticking pragmatically to the landowner Bhaskaran's farms for work, the Kattunaikas and the Paniyas here had to rely on the Wayanadan Chetty farmers in their older location for occasional work.

While the immediate granting of alternate land complicates the identification of this process as "enclosure," it can be seen as a classic example of pushing out through the power of regulation, described by Hall, Hirsch, and Li (2011).[21] This expulsion runs parallel to the

[20] Project Tiger was inaugurated in the country in 1973, shortly after the enactment of the Wildlife Protection Act in 1972. Margulies (2017) observes that the project emerged from the thinking that tiger conservation was an element of nation building. The project placed at its focus the tiger, an animal that suffered rampant hunting under the British rule. As a consequence, the tiger became India's "premiere conservation symbol" (*ibid.*).

[21] Hall, Hirsch, and Li (2011), based on their studies in Southeast Asia, put forward regulation, the market, force, and legitimation as the four "powers of exclusion" operating in the lives of rural peoples.

lopsided implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA). Those few Paniya households that have demanded forestland under the FRA have received only patches. The law has to date not been implemented to its fullest potential, especially in terms of granting "community rights," although the number of plots that have been given "Records of Rights" in the province is among the highest in the country (Münster and Vishnudas 2012, Sathyapalan 2010, Sudheesh 2013, 2015). The FRA will be taken up for further examination in Chapter 6.

Pushed Out of Social Mobility

Landlessness and insecure livelihoods have understandably stalled any upward mobility for the Paniyas. Despite being the largest Scheduled Tribe in Kerala, their presence in public employment is almost nil. Hearing about a recent drive of interviews conducted for Kerala government jobs that were reserved for the Scheduled Tribes, I filed a Right to Information (RTI) request in the Wayanad office of the Public Service Commission, seeking the number of Paniyas who received a job. The reply simply mentioned that no data was available disaggregated by the name of the community. From Paniya activists, I understood that no Paniya youth had been given a position. In December 2017, young Paniya, Adiya, and Kattunaika men and women took out a rally in Sulthan Bathery town protesting against the exclusion (figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3. A protest in Sulthan Bathery, 11 December 2017. The banner reads: "Protest against the nexus between politicians and Public Service Commission bureaucrats that sabotaged the special recruitment of Paniya, Adiya, and Kattunaika youth." Image by the author.

In the 11 months that I spent in Wayanad, I found all positions reserved for the Adivasis in the local offices of the Scheduled Tribes Development Department occupied by the landowning Kuruma and Kurichya Adivasi communities. The only reserved position where I could find some Paniyas – mostly women – was that of the tribal promoter. As noted in Chapter 2, the promoter is a frontline worker who serves as the contact point of the Scheduled Tribes Development Department in the Adivasi colonies. The promoter does all kinds of administrative work – from filling out application forms for schemes in the department and the *panchayaths* to ensuring that Adivasi kids go to school. They carry the burden of delivering the Kerala state's welfare generosity on their shoulders but are provided with an income that is too meagre to support social mobility. Once a promoter, whom I accompanied in visits to the assigned colonies, expressed anguish before me that she had been given the task of looking out for "POCSO cases," indicating how the usual welfare tasks were topped up occasionally with surveillance work. POCSO cases involved a girl under 18 and/or a boy under 21 entering a marital relationship, which was registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012. The promoter was appointed on a contract for two years. The job paid a

monthly stipend of Rs.9,000, most of which got spent in travel between the colonies and government offices and in medical emergencies. Competition for the post was immense. Promoters who did not secure a position often accused others of using "party connections," referring to contacts in political parties. To figure out the number of Paniya promoters, I filed a second RTI request in the Tribal Development Office (TDO) in Sulthan Bathery. Although the Paniyas form the majority of the Adivasi population in the district, their representation in the promoter position was far below their proportion in the population. Through a local Paniya activist, the information received was published in the Wayanad edition of the Malayalam newspaper Mathrubhumi, which sought a response from the TDO. The TDO had no reply and simply said that proper procedures were followed in the recruitment.

The TDO's cold response can be made sense of if we place it against the backdrop of the prevailing agrarian changes in Wayanad and the differential ways in which the landed and landless Adivasi communities were adapting to the changes. Kunhiraman, a Kuruma farmer who retired from the Forest Department, was now trying organic farming. As Kunze (2017) shows, Kuruma men still hold on to paddy farming to the extent they can, citing its cultural value to the community. Kunhiraman's house was like any other middle-class Hindu household of Kerala, decorated with brass vessels and clay figures of popular gods. We chatted about the receding rains, pepper prices, and human-wildlife conflict. Like in the case of Bhaskaran, the Wayanadan Chetty farmer, Kunhiraman's sons were well-placed in government jobs. I soon realised that the Kurumas were adapting to the agrarian changes around them much better than the Paniyas. Though paddy was receding, most Kuruma families continued to produce the grain for a part of self-consumption, which allowed them to build savings from other sources of income. For instance, they could afford to send their children to coaching classes for the Public Service Commission exams. Contacts in government jobs were called upon to stand as

guarantors whenever loans were needed.[22] The Paniyas, starting out at landlessness, did not have access to any of these adaptive mechanisms and hence lost out on opportunities for social mobility.

At the end of the conversation, Kunhiraman took me around his farms. There was a Paniya colony at the fringes of the farms. Generations from this colony had served Kunhiraman and his ancestors. He introduced me to them saying, "This guy is a researcher; he has come to see *you Adivasis*." It struck me that Kunhiraman said "you Adivasis" as if he was not an Adivasi himself. It was clear in Kunhiraman's tone that his words implied the stigma of poverty and landlessness attached to being a Paniya specifically.

A further instance that revealed this stigma was the Paniyas' inability to find work in Wayanad's mushrooming tourism, a sector that displays the expansion of consumption among the middle and upper classes of the country following the liberalisation of the country's economy in 1991. Although it was common for the Paniya youth to present traditional music and dance at tourist resorts, they were hardly ever employed in these resorts, ostensibly because they lacked the communication and professional skills required.[23] It was a common sight in Wayanad to find walled resorts – also products of Wayanad's agrarian changes – standing next to Paniya colonies. The picture that thus emerges is this: systematic expulsion of the Paniyas from livelihoods generation after generation has kept social mobility far out of their reach.

From an intergenerational perspective, one could ask if the celebrated educational achievements of Kerala and the large service sector that drove the provincial economy could not facilitate social mobility among the younger generation. Landlessness and the Paniyas'

[22] As mentioned before, land owned by those belonging to Scheduled Tribes are frowned upon for loans. Having a government employee stand as guarantor is an alternative to secure a loan.
[23] In 2018, the district administration came up with a plan to set up an "ethnic village" and a "tribal theme park" in the district to provide employment to Adivasi communities (Deccan Chronicle 2018). The park expected Adivasis to present their art forms (and their own selves) for the consumption of tourist onlookers. Even in this despicable proposal, the Adivasis were not salaried employees.

position in Wayanadan society again become hindrances. Two vignettes revealed how subtly this could work.

In the first instance, I was volunteering with the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha (AGMS) in 2019 in supporting Paniya school students seeking admission in Class 11 in schools (state-owned and private) regulated by the Kerala government. Admissions to this class were done online; the volunteers were trying to bridge the digital divide that existed between the Paniya colonies and the rest of Wayanad. The provincial government provided eight percent reservation for Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in schools (although STs formed only 1.5 percent of the province's population). This applied to Wayanad district as well. However, 18 percent of Wayanad's population belonged to Scheduled Tribes. This roughly meant that there were far fewer seats available to these students than the number that was eligible for admission. The isolated geography of Wayanad did not allow these students, roughly at the age of 16, to travel to another district and seek admission. Consequently, hundreds of students, mostly Paniya, dropped out. The few Adivasis who got into the reserved seats were more often than not from the landowning communities. A further hindrance was that most reserved seats were allotted to the science stream, leaving very few for commerce and humanities, the other two sets of subjects on offer. Paniya students, many of them first-generation applicants to Class 11, tended to stay away from the science stream (that includes mathematics), discouraged by a lack of proper support at home for these purportedly difficult subjects. Even when a few of them decided to apply to schools in a different district, they found that there were no affordable student accommodation facilities available there, or that the reserved ST seats had been converted into General category seats. Under the rules, schools could convert reserved seats that were not claimed by a set deadline into General seats. Other districts, which did not have a sizeable ST population, saw hundreds of ST seats getting converted this way. Many private schools did this to receive donations from the General category parents. This whole affair

repeated in 2020. While taking out the precise data on these observations to send to the media (The Hindu 2020), I realised that this pattern had been extant for almost a decade, which meant that the cumulative number of dropouts was in thousands. This exclusion from Class 11 admission occurred in addition to the dropout caused by the lack of sufficient tutorial support for Paniya students after receiving admission. Students and AGMS volunteers supporting them organised protests in front of the district administration in 2020 in the middle of a difficult pandemic (figure 4.4), but the administration agreed only to a partial, temporary increase in the number of seats.



Figure 4.4: Protest by the Adishakthi Summer School, a Dalit-Adivasi student collective formed under the aegis of the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha. The protest began on 28 September 2020 and lasted a month. The banner reads "Education is our birthright: Adivasi *Satyagraham* (protest seeking truth)." Image by Adishakthi Summer School.

The second experience was in connection with finding employment for young Paniya men from a colony in my fieldwork area. Upon expression of interest by these youngsters in learning hairstyling, volunteers of the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha had secured their admission

in a year-long skill-building course that would prospectively lead to work in Kerala's film industry. All expenses in Ernakulam city, where the course was based, were taken care of by the institute offering the course and the AGMS. The young men dropped out in a few months and came back to Wayanad. I accompanied an activist of the AGMS to the colony one late evening to find out what transpired. Her expression of concern for the youth did not go down well; the parents of the young men categorically stated that they would not be sent back, as a local upper-caste Hindu *velichappadu* ("oracle") had predicted they would meet with death if they left Wayanad. Although a couple of Paniya men who had completed college education from the same colony (and hence related to these families) tried to persuade the parents to change their minds, they were shooed away as these men had converted to Pentecostal Christianity and were no longer trusted. Our enquiries revealed that upper-caste Hindu families in the neighbourhood with links to the Hindu-fundamentalist organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ("national volunteers group") were actively dissuading the Paniya youth from leaving the colonies, promising work in their farms (a promise that would eventually be broken considering how they were moving out of farming). Paniya landlessness, old links with the upper-caste neighbours, the subtle violence embedded within this relationship, and the crisis in farming – all congealed into this moment that obstructed an avenue of employment that the Paniya youth had initially chosen to pursue.[24]

[24] Though I could not explore it in greater detail for want of fieldwork time, it was increasingly becoming clear that in these cramped colonies of around 15 households each (the households were more often than not related to each other), there were the Pentecostal missionaries and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh trying to make inroads, besides the long-standing influences of the CPI(M) and (to a lesser extent) the Congress. This process was slowly tearing these settlements apart. The work of missionaries among Dalits and Adivasis is a complex topic requiring nuanced analysis that was beyond the scope of this project. In Kerala, see Mohan (2015) and in Tamil Nadu, see Roberts (2016), Viswanath (2014) and Mosse (2012) for works related to missionaries and Dalits. See Chandra (2016) for missionaries' engagements with Adivasis in colonial Jharkhand and Baviskar (2005) for RSS' engagement with Adivasis in contemporary Madhya Pradesh.

Pushed Out of Received Land

A final expulsion that the Paniyas face is from the land they received through land struggles. Scattered land struggles were on in Wayanad throughout the period of fieldwork. We saw in Chapter 1 how residents of Palakkode colony were forced to continue living there even after receiving land. Receiving land that could not be used to earn a livelihood was a theme that I encountered in the Aralam land distribution project as well. Three thousand acres of the Aralam Farm were converted to a resettlement site for Adivasis selected for land assignment, following the land struggles of the early 2000s. Each recipient household was given 90 cents of land in one corner of the site to farm and ten cents to build a house in another. All the ten-cent plots were stacked together to mimic the colony structure back in Wayanad. Many people were given rocky land. Those who tried to farm saw their crop destroyed by wildlife. Disappointed, many left the site and went back to live in their old colonies. Thus, the Paniyas were pushed out of redistributive justice as well. This project is taken up for detailed enquiry in Chapter 7.

Conclusion

This chapter brought out the muldirectional and simultaneous expulsions that the Paniyas faced and provided a context to their demands for cultivable land. The vignettes presented how the slow changes brought about by capitalist transformations of the countryside led to these expulsions. The chapter thus demonstrated how the Paniyas were turning into a surplus population whose wage labour was becoming less relevant to the local growth path. The multidirectional livelihood expulsions that they encountered triggered disparate everyday negotiations to make ends meet, culminating in land struggles.

Two points about class could be made following this analysis. Firstly, as we saw in the range of expulsions, it is not easily possible to move seamlessly from one insecure livelihood to another or combine different livelihoods. Thus, the general conclusion drawn about the countryside in the developing world (Bryceson and Jamal 2019, Ploeg 2008) – that households

combine multiple, precarious livelihoods to make ends meet ("pluriactivity") – needs to be qualified. The Paniyas' experiences demonstrated how finding a livelihood had become extremely difficult, despite the presence of reservations in public sector jobs and welfare measures like the NREGA. "Pluri-inactivity" – the lull resulting from the inability to find work in multiple sectors – was as much a reality as pluriactivity for the Paniyas.

Second, the class position of the Paniyas is inextricably linked to their position in the caste hierarchy. This point is often missed by the political parties and the state, reflected in their use of the term "marginal farmers" that clubs together a large number of communities while surveying the agrarian classes. Such a narrow understanding of class by the state leads to a scenario in which the Syrian Christians and Nairs, upper castes that own the highest shares of land in Kerala, are clubbed within the category of marginal farmers. These two communities respectively own only 0.28 hectares and 0.21 hectares of land on average (Yadu and Vijayasuryan 2016). These figures must be seen in the light of the rampant fragmentation of land over the years and do not diminish the social, economic, and cultural capital that these communities hold, especially in comparison with the Paniyas. Both the CPI(M) and the Indian National Congress have liberally allowed affluent cultivators to use the "poor farmer" trope to consolidate their base. In addition, the CPI(M) has repeatedly pointed out identity politics as a threat to class politics (CPIM 2018). These positions of the parties miss the fact that the struggles of the Paniyas are closely linked to their intersectional caste-class status in society.

The "pluri-inactivity" noted above does not mean that Paniya labourers remain dormant, waiting for the *grama panchayath* to bring them the rice and kerosene earmarked for them. They break out in land struggles. In the case of the Paniya youth, a gradual shift can be seen towards struggles for seats in schools, colleges, and public employment. They have refused to be turned into a mass of footloose labour, migrating to the metropolitan cities. The

chapter presented a case of the impact of Kerala's growth in Adivasi lives not through a sudden intrusion of capital, but through long-drawn processes of agrarian and land-use changes.

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Balan's tapioca plans were obstructed by floods that ravaged Wayanad and the rest of the province in the next two years (2018 and 2019). Biju, his son, had enrolled himself in a skill-building course in lift repair at a nearby college. Treating me at his house to porridge and a *chutney* of the notoriously spicey *kaanthari* chilli grown in the sliver of vacant land in the backyard, Biju stated, "There is no more point in farming." He had gone to search for work in the ginger farms in the neighbouring Karnataka province, but this proved difficult – work for Paniya labourers was becoming more and more erratic now.

Listening to our conversation, Velliyamma, Balan's mother, came close to us and burst into a story on ginger.

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5 | Ginger Surplus

Velliyamma had refused to speak to me the first time I visited her colony. I had wanted to know about ginger. Thousands from her Paniya community had gone to work in the ginger farms across the provincial border, where farmers from more affluent communities in Wayanad grew the crop on leased land. “There is a lot to say if I begin; I’d rather not,” Velliyamma had muttered as she turned me away.

The next time I was talking to her grandson about ginger. Velliyamma was preparing her betel-and-areca treat in her verandah. As our conversation proceeded, she left the work and inched close to us in curiosity. Unlike the consent-seeking rituals taught to me at universities, Velliyamma became a part of my enquiry through rejection first, followed later by quiet consent. She remembered:

> I had gone to the farm of one Mathai. He still knows me; just go ask him. He saw me as his own mother. When his mother died, he wanted me to plant the first ginger. I told him, Mathai – I called him by his name – I cannot come this year. He insisted and I went. That ginger came out well. He got sacks full and turned rich. Now the rich do not want us. We took care of them like our own children. We had nothing, but we worked hard for them. It was our *coolie pani* (wage labour) that made them rich.

I had met Mathai a couple of weeks before in his house, situated only a few kilometres away from Velliyamma’s colony. Mathai was one of the neo-rich in Wayanad who had made windfalls from ginger. A two-storeyed shopping complex built with ginger money stood next to his house. The Ginger Farmers Collective’s office was situated on its top floor. Mathai had explained in our meeting how he got his labourers:

> We took the labourers who worked in our plots here in Wayanad. These Adivasis live together – 50 people, 100 people. When I call them to the ginger farms, they come. They return and tell the others in the colonies that Mathai *chettan* is a nice person. The others follow.[25]

What happened, then, for Velliyamma and Mathai to become estranged? Why did Velliyamma and Mathai get into ginger labour/cultivation in the first place? What is there "a lot to say" about ginger, as Velliyamma had remarked? Is not laying off labourers a common occurrence in capitalist relations?

This chapter seeks answers to these questions, locating them against the backdrop of the agrarian changes underway in Wayanad. Taking up the case of rural-to-rural movement of capital in an enterprise of speculative ginger farming, the chapter explores how the Paniyas were rendered "surplus" from this sector, in order to zoom into a case of how resistance by the Paniyas to their exploitation and oppression by the farmers played a role in the process. The aim of the chapter is to magnify how the Paniyas' perpetual struggles are linked to the development pathway followed by Kerala. Agrarian changes in Kerala are producing new sites of capital accumulation, such as the capitalist ginger farming sector, which in turn have consequences for the Paniyas' livelihoods.

Speculative ginger farming came up in the early 1990s in the wake of the agrarian crisis in Kerala and involved capitalist farmers from the district of Wayanad, mostly from the affluent Syrian Christian community, taking up large tracts of land in the villages of the neighbouring province of Karnataka to grow ginger based on speculation of prices (Münster 2015, Münster and Münster 2012). Landless Adivasi labourers, mostly the Paniyas, and to a lesser extent the

[25] *Chettan*, meaning brother, is often used to refer to Syrian Christian men as in this case.

Adiyas and the Kattunaikas, were taken along to work these farms until recently but are now being replaced with local labourers from the Scheduled Caste of Waddar from Karnataka.

This chapter captures the recent processes through which this replacement occurred and shows that it was not just a product of the lower wages demanded by the Waddar. The capitalist farmers felt a need to leave behind the baggage of their historical relations with the Paniyas when the land struggles of the latter started to gradually highlight their exploitation and oppression in the ginger farms. The historical caste-class relations between the Syrian Christian farmers and the Paniya labourers took shape through the transactions and interactions between the two communities since the former settled in Wayanad in various waves, beginning in the 1940s. While the relations between the ginger farmers and the Waddar are also unequal, the equation does not accrue baggage because of the tendency of ginger farming to move and because of the ways in which the Waddar are recruited.

The replacement of one labourer community with another has been observed all over India. The replacement of the Halipati Adivasi community with more pliable circular migrants by their employers in Western Gujarat (Breman 2019) or indeed the replacement of the Paniyas with circular migrants by employers back home in Wayanad are just a few instances. In the specific case of the ginger sector, the Paniyas were employed for nearly three decades despite their wages being higher than that of the local labourers in Karnataka. They had participation in the labour unions as well as access to a host of welfare programmes back home in Kerala. The recent rejection they face from employment in ginger farms, thus, helps us turn attention to the role played by politics, in the form of resistance, in the production of a specific case of surplus population.

The chapter draws on fieldwork in Wayanad, ginger farms in Mysore district (Karnataka), and agriculture-related state agencies in Mysore city. The chapter is divided into

five further parts. It begins with a brief introduction to the three communities other than the Paniyas that appear in this story: the Syrian Christians, the Waddar, and the Lingayat landowners of Karnataka. The next section provides an overview of the speculative ginger farming sector and elaborates how it initially seemed to offer an "agrarian escape" to the farmers, labourers, and landowners, although in disparate ways. The next section provides the perspectives of the farmers regarding their enterprise. Following this, I dwell on the moments through which the Paniyas were rendered surplus. Next, the chapter highlights the "agrarian moral economies" at work in the rise of the ginger sector. The section that follows attempts an analysis of this story using the lens of relational inequality, drawing on Tilly (1998) and Mosse (2010). In the conclusion, I bring out how the Paniyas' experience in the ginger farms helps us understand one possible way in which surplus populations are produced.

Community Profiles

The communities involved in the speculative ginger farming sector, along with their roles, are listed in table 1. To give a rough indication of their position in the caste hierarchies, the communities are grouped as per their placement in the public reservation categories.

State classification	**Kerala**	**Karnataka**
General	Syrian Christians (farmers) Nairs (farmers; very few)	
Other Backward Classes	Ezhavas (farmers; very few) Mappilas (farmers; very few)	Lingayats (landlords) Vokkaligas (landlords)
Scheduled Castes		Waddar (labourers)
Scheduled Tribes	Paniyas (labourers) Adiyas (labourers; very few) Kattunaikas (labourers; very few)	

Table 1: Communities and roles in ginger farming

Syrian Christians

Syrian Christians trace their origins to the legend of conversion of local Brahmins by St. Thomas, a disciple of Jesus Christ, in the first century A.D. Since the first major split in the sixteenth century under the Portuguese, they are today divided into eight different denominations. The community is not provided with any reservation in public sector employment or higher education, reflective of their dominant status. They hold the largest landholdings in the province on average (Yadu 2015, Yadu and Vijayasuryan 2016).[26] Fuller (1976) notes that the Syrian Christians and the two other Christian communities in Kerala may be regarded as castes.[27] Not only are they endogamous and differentiated in land ownership (with Syrian Christians on top), they are also ranked with respect to the other (non-Christian) castes in society.

The Syrian Christians migrated to the highlands of Wayanad from southern Kerala starting in the 1940s in several waves of settlement, as noted in Chapter 3. They still hold on to legends about the difficult sojourn and maintain close ties with their native places. While interviewing Syrian Christian farmers, including Mathai, I had noticed that many of them pronounced the Malayalam word *bhoomi* (land) as *foomi*, typical of southern Kerala, though they were third-generation settlers in Wayanad. Tales of fighting the difficult terrain in Wayanad abound in narratives of Syrian Christian elders, who refer to lands they acquired as vacant (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2015). Varghese (2009) argues that the Syrian Christians brought a new economic modernity of capitalism to Kerala that thrust

[26] Yadu and Vijayasuryan (2016) calculate the average land owning 0.69 acres, against 0.32 acres owned by Scheduled Tribes, based on National Sample Survey data. The Scheduled Tribes category here hides the vast difference between landowning Adivasi communities and landless Adivasi communities like the Paniyas. Zachariah (2016) estimates the population of Syrian Christians as 13.3 percent of Kerala's total population of 30 million.

[27] The two others are Latin Catholics (Other Backward Class), mostly from the fishing castes converted by Portuguese colonisers in the sixteenth century, and the Protestant converts, mostly from the ex-untouchable castes converted by missionaries during the British Raj.

improvement of "empty" lands for development of the self and thereby adopted a new subjectivity of *purogamana karshakar* ("progress-oriented farmers").

To provide a brief vignette, the self-improving spirit of the ginger farmers was visible at the annual meeting of the Ginger Farmers Collective that I attended in Wayanad, where, following discussions on accounts of the organisation, an "expert" held a class on "family relations." The class involved the expert patronisingly telling spouses of the farmers to be patient with their partners while they toiled hard away from home. This session hinted at the ways in which patriarchy was maintained to feed into the path of capitalist accumulation followed by the "hardworking" ginger farmers.

Waddar

The Waddar of Karnataka are a Telugu-speaking labourer community. They have many sub-groups that may or may not intermarry. The Kal Waddar and the Mann Waddar are the two major ones; they traditionally worked in stone cutting and earth-related work, respectively. It is the Mann Waddar who were brought into ginger work. The able-bodied among them moved around in search of work, which gave them the image of being nomads (Kerr 2006). They were constructed as suspicious people in the colonial records (*ibid.*). This stigmatisation eventually culminated in their inclusion in the colonial category of criminalised tribes (Bhat 1984, Nair 1997). They were placed in the category of Scheduled Castes in postcolonial times, initially under the name Bovi. The large variations in the name of the caste – Bovi, Odda, Waddar, Wudder – reflect the regional variations in the places they went to work, and have caused confusion in their enumeration (Karanth 2004). The caste continues to face social ostracism today (The Hindu 2019). Their Scheduled Caste status has been contested by other castes in the same category, who point out that although the Waddar have faced ostracism traditionally, they were historically not untouchable (The Hindu 2017).

The Landowners

The landowners who gave their plots on lease to the Wayanadan farmers were mostly from the Lingayat and Vokkaliga castes. Both are affluent castes that have a considerable hold over land ownership and Karnataka's politics (Manor 2007). I give a brief profile of the Lingayats here as the landowners I met in the fieldwork villages belonged to this caste. Since the focus of the chapter is on the replacement of the Paniyas with the Waddar by the Syrian Christians, the landowner castes of Karnataka will not be considered in the analysis undertaken here. It is important, however, to include these castes in order to understand how the ginger sector found its terrain in Karnataka's hinterlands.

The Lingayat caste has its origins in a twelfth-century social reform movement that challenged the caste system, including its rituals, scriptures, and notions of purity and pollution (Bowker 2000). The movement welcomed members of all castes into its fold – from Brahmins to then untouchables (Hunashal 1947, Ishwaran 1992). Over time, they consolidated landholdings and, in parallel with the Vokkaligas, became holders of hereditary village headmen positions in rural Karnataka (Patil 2007). In an estimate based on sample surveys, the Lingayats were found to hold 27 percent of all land in the province, at par with the Vokkaligas (Chinnappa Reddy Commission 1990, cited in Patil 2002). The community eventually enclosed itself into an endogamous caste, with sub-castes engaged in agriculture, commerce, priesthood, and various services (Patil 2002). Notions of purity and pollution are integral to the caste now (Desai 2019).[28] Lingayats have also diversified to invest in education and public employment like many other middle castes in India (see, for instance, Jeffrey 2010 for Jats in western Uttar Pradesh). They are said to own one-third of the colleges in the province today (Indian Express

[28] Reflective of the strict caste rules, Chandrapura, one of my fieldwork villages with 300 Lingayat households, was witness to a case of "honour killing" in 2016, when a 21-year old was fed poison by her Lingayat parents for an alleged relationship with a lower-caste man.

2018). In contrast with those living in urban centres, Lingayats still based in the rural areas were reeling under the agrarian crisis that struck Karnataka after the liberalisation of the Indian economy and were desperate for an escape. Of late, the entire caste has been mired in an internal turmoil over whether those who have imbibed Hindu values must be considered a separate group (see M.M. Kalburgi's arguments examined in Devadevan 2018, Lankesh 2017). The debate has split the caste members, who were already bargaining with the state over receiving the status of a separate religion. Although the links of these demands and the turmoil within the caste with the agrarian crisis are not obvious, it is probable that there is much anxiety in the rural areas regarding the consolidation of any available social power. The agrarian crisis, Karnataka's land reforms (that took away surplus land from the Lingayats), and termination of hereditary village headman positions have been argued as leading to insecurity about losing dominance among this caste (Vasavi 2001).

An Agrarian Escape?

Münster (2015) argues that Wayanadan farmers took to ginger farming against the backdrop of the agrarian crisis in the district. Focusing on Syrian Christian farmers, Münster describes how and why these farmers came into ginger farming, the role of luck and (masculine) aspirations, and the steps involved in tending ginger to take advantage of a possible boom. My own field observations corroborated these findings; I give a quick overview and go on to elaborate additional information gathered during the fieldwork relevant to understanding this sector.

Ginger has a particular advantage: it can be stored underground for a long period of time, aiding speculation over its prices (Münster 2015). Typically, a lease is taken for 18 months. Ginger is planted around February. The crop is ready in seven months, leaving 11 months for speculation (*ibid.*). Ginger had already been grown traditionally in Wayanad before

the speculative venture came up and thus the farmers were already familiar with the process of tending the crop.[29]

My reading of newspaper archives indicated that the Wayanadan farmers started to look out for new lands to grow ginger when three factors came together: diseases affecting the crop became frequent, land became scarce, and sales tax imposed by the Kerala government on fresh ginger choked earnings (Mathrubhumi 1999b). Farmers complained that the Kerala government did not agree to stop the imposition of sales tax even when the price of ginger went down. In 1999, the tax was increased by 70 percent when the price of ginger went up so that the farmers ended up earning Rs.100 less than in Karnataka (Mathrubhumi 1999a). This price difference continued in the 2000s: while the price of a sack (weighing 60kg) was Rs.300 in Wayanad in the year 2000, the price was Rs.400 right on the other side of the border in Kodagu district, Karnataka (Mathrubhumi 2000).

Whether ginger should be made tax-free has been a long-running debate in Kerala. A case that came to the High Court of Kerala in 1962 heard the plea to classify fresh ginger as a vegetable, which would make the product tax-free. The judge observed that although ginger was a vegetable by dictionary definition, the government had the power to classify it as a taxable spice (Kerala High Court 1962). Fresh ginger was tax-free in Karnataka as the provincial government went by the logic that this product perished readily after harvest and therefore could not be considered an aromatic product, a classification that would make it taxable (Mathrubhumi 1999a).[30] In addition, because ginger was not yet common in Karnataka, the probability of diseases afflicting the crop was low. Land was available in abundance in the

[29] Wayanad leads among all 14 districts in Kerala in ginger cultivation even today. In fact, ginger requirements of Kerala are met from within the province. Kerala contributes only 3.4 percent of India's total production of ginger.

[30] Under the new Goods and Services Tax (GST) that came into effect in India in 2017, fresh ginger has been made tax-free throughout the country. Dry ginger or any other processed form attracts a tax of 5 percent. GST replaced all province-level sales taxes.

villages there, too. The lease amount was a mere Rs.500 per acre in the early 1990s (Mathrubhumi 1999b). Thus, higher price prospects positioned Karnataka as a potential new place for exploring ginger farming.

Meanwhile, landowners in Karnataka were looking for alternative sources of income from their land when they got struck by the agrarian crisis. The liberalisation of the Indian economy had unleashed a crisis in Karnataka's agriculture, especially with the withdrawal of state support from the 1990s onwards (Deshpande 2012). Karnataka already stood second, after Rajasthan, in terms of share of drought-prone area and ranked among the lowest in terms of area under irrigation. Farmer suicides were reported in this province as well, especially in the northern areas. The agricultural sector currently accounts for 17 percent of the Net State Domestic Product – a decline to half of what it was in the 1990s. The sector still employs 69 percent of the workforce (*ibid*.). For the landowners, leasing out their land to Wayanadan farmers to cultivate ginger provided an alternative source of income. A local factor that became important in Kodagu, the district where the ginger trend began, was the crash of the coffee economy.[31] Leasing out the paddy land they owned to Wayanadan farmers helped the coffee farmers here withstand the crash (Ambinakudige 2006).

Abraham, a Syrian Christian ginger farmer I met in his farm in Chandrapura village, Mysore district, Karnataka, said, "We give them in one go eight years' worth of earnings from paddy." The villages were still too far away from Mysore city for the lands to be acquired for any big project. The landowners I interviewed were widely appreciative of the Wayanadan farmers; only a couple of them complained about the reduced fertility of the soil after the farmers left post-harvest. The interactions between the landowners, whose houses were all built

[31] During fieldwork, many people referred to going for ginger farming simply as going to Kodagu, as also noted by Münster (2015).

in close proximity to each other away from the farms, and the farmers were limited to the occasional monetary transactions. Parvathi, a landowner in Chandrapura, said:

> The Kerala farmers solved all our problems. We were able to marry off our daughters. We did not even know how or where to dig a borewell. Also, the labourers in our village got a livelihood because of them. The Kerala farmers are good people. They treat the soil well. They became one of us. They put up solar fencing to protect our farms from thieves. They come to this part of the village only when they need labourers, or to talk to people when they are bored.

Thus the Lingayat landowners' willingness to lease out land to Kerala's farmers was rooted in the transaction's utility in financing a caste-appropriate lifestyle (which included marrying off their daughters).

Ginger farmers strongly believe that they should not repeat the crop in the same land as it would invite rot. Thus, fresh lands are sought after every harvest. Since the farming moves, it is difficult to estimate the acreage, but close to 10,000 acres were reportedly brought under the crop in Karnataka at its peak (Rajeev 2018).

Tasks on the farm are gendered. Male labourers are involved in preparing the land for planting by creating mounds called "beds." Men also prepare fertiliser compounds and dip the young tubers in them before they are sown. The task of watering the plants—at least four times a day—is also that of men. Women help in planting and harvesting. The harvest is picked up by local traders, who bring it to washing units present in the towns nearby (figure 5.1). Washed ginger is then transported to the metropolitan cities of Bangalore and Mumbai, sometimes as far away as Delhi. During fieldwork, fertiliser companies were seen hovering around the farms and selling their brochures at the Ginger Farmers Collective's meeting in Wayanad. The sector uses generous amounts of chemical fertilisers as the focus is on maximising the yield within the 18-month lease period (see also Münster 2015).



Figure 5.1: A ginger washing unit in HD Kote town, Mysore District, Karnataka. Image by the author.

From Kodagu, the venture slowly moved to the other districts of Karnataka. Farming in Kodagu was dependent on the rains, which eventually became uncertain (Mathrubhumi 1999c). In addition, the cost of cultivation in Kodagu shot up. The lease amount went up from Rs.13,000 per acre in April 1999 to Rs.15,000 per acre in June 2000. Other farming-related expenditures went up by Rs.20,000 during this period (*ibid.*). Diseases appeared here as well, especially soft blight and leaf blight. This scenario could have led to the belief that repeating ginger in the same plot invited rot. From Karnataka, ginger farming has now moved to the central Indian provinces of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand in search of newer lands and cheaper leases and labour.

The ginger enterprise initially seemed to present an "agrarian escape" – an alternative to the agrarian crisis within the agrarian sector – to the four communities involved. For the Syrian Christians (as well as the few Nairs and Mappilas), it presented an alternative means of accumulation (Münster 2015). For the Adivasis, it initially promised an alternative source of employment, though, as we will see, it turned out to be equally arduous as work back home. For the Waddar, too, it currently provides an alternative source of livelihood, as their traditional skills in earth-related work have very few takers now. The arid lands some of them own are unproductive and work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is

haphazard. For the local landlords from the Lingayat and Vokkaliga castes, leasing out land for ginger farming provided an alternative to the loss-making farming they had undertaken.

Ginger money is transforming the landscape of Wayanad as well as Karnataka's hinterlands. Wayanad has seen several commercial buildings and hotels come up with investments from ginger. The district's first shopping mall – the Mint Mall – had money minted from ginger behind it. Across the border, the venture is leaving a trail of environmental degradation as it moves on to fresher lands. Borewells are depleting groundwater. Since the farmers know they will leave the plot after harvest, there is no commitment to maintaining or improving the quality of the soil.[32] The Varada, Kumudavati, Tunga, and Bhadra rivers that irrigate the land in Karnataka are reportedly being polluted, and frogs, fish, and crabs are disappearing (Suchitra 2015). Currently, a few landlords in Karnataka have themselves stepped into ginger farming, seeing the Wayanadan farmers make riches in their backyard.

Farmer Perspectives

This section provides a brief look at the ginger farmers' own perspectives on their enterprise. The Syrian Christians in Wayanad were well aware of their community's role in ginger farming. Tony, a 50-year old Syrian Christian banker I met in Wayanad, observes:

> Our people prospered through farming. Then came the crop failure, some 30 years ago. That is when ginger farming makes an appearance – to survive. But only a few people who went for it prospered. Of every 1,000 who went, maybe a 100 made it. Some had sold their assets to go there. The Travancore migrants started it. But the others followed. Even Mappilas, who are generally not into farming.

Reaching the Wayanadan farmers in their farms in Karnataka was no easy task as these were located in villages cut off from public transport. Abraham, the Syrian Christian farmer growing

[32] The impact of ginger farming on environment is an important topic, but beyond the scope of this thesis.

ginger in Chandrapura village, was busy supervising the work in the vast 10 acres he had taken on a lease (figure 5.2). The farm was scorched in the blazing sun, with only an occasional tree available for shade. The other sign of green were the ginger plants in a few pockets. It was harvest time and most of the land was cleared of the crop. Heaps of ginger lay intermittently with prepared sacks. In a corner, a labourer I immediately recognised as Paniya was weighing and preparing the sacks, each measuring 60kg, along with a group of Waddar workers. Only a few years ago, most labourers on the ginger farms would have been Paniya.



Figure 5.2: Fresh harvest from Abraham's farm and preparation of sacks of 60kg. Image by the author.

A tent near the entrance to the farm served as Abraham's dwelling for the time he was in the village. He visited his family in Wayanad every 14 days as the current farm was still within a three-hour drive. He had got into this sector at the age of 17 through his relatives, and has been consistently making profits:

> I started 25 years ago. The expense per acre was Rs.50,000 then. We got 100 sacks per acre. Only Ecalex and Endophil were sprayed. The price of ginger was Rs.1,000 per sack. We got Rs.100,000 (per acre). Rs.50,000 was the profit (per acre). It was a big amount back then. Then one day the price rose to Rs.8,000. Three ships bound for India had got wrecked and all the ginger was lost. That's how the price rose. Imagine the profits we got!

The Syrian Christians did not all start rich. I met Babu in another village in Mysore district; his farm closely resembled that of Abraham in its vastness and dry appearance. Babu had gotten into ginger gradually, starting off as a labour supervisor:

> I was going for *coolie pani* (wage labour) earlier. My father's sister's children and their cousins are doing the farming here. So, we are all brothers actually. I first came here for *coolie pani*. They slowly began to trust me and thought that I should stay. Now we are 10 partners. This is 17 acres. I come for 10 days; we come here in shifts.

The scenario comes close to the "fraternal capital" that Chari (2004) describes in the case of the Gounder caste of Tamil Nadu, whose pooled investments made the town of Thiruppur a hub of textile manufacturing. When the agrarian crisis hit Wayanad, Syrian Christian farmers were thus equipped with the economic, social, and cultural capital needed to move over to Karnataka to find a new avenue of accumulation in ginger. Babu owned 40 cents of land back home, but he could not grow ginger there because he would not be able to make a profit if he repeated ginger in the same land, he said. The decision to get into such a risky venture was shaped not just by hope for luck, but also by fear and by plans regarding his children's future:

> There is fear. But there is no point fearing. *Mannil paniyeduthaal ennenkilum kittum* (if you work on land, you will get the returns someday). The elders say that the earth does not cheat the one who works on it. It might take eight to ten years. What if a price of Rs.2,000 per sack comes next year; what if I get 400 sacks next year. My debts will be over. I come here on that hope. Of every 100 who tried ginger, only 20 would have prospered. 80 percent did not. Two suicided just last year…I have only one wish. I have two kids. By the time my daughter grows up, I want to make Rs.1 million. That is why I work hard. It is not for me. I don't even have a motorcycle or a car.

The ginger enterprise has produced its millionaires and its victims. Quite a few suicides have occurred in this sector when farmers suffered losses following periods of bust (Münster 2015). Farmer after farmer I met in the field would utter rapid mental calculations of expenses and profits, as Ameer, a Mappila entrepreneur, did:

> If we get 300 sacks from an acre and the price of a sack goes up to Rs.2,000, we get a total of Rs.600,000. After expenses, that means a profit of Rs.300,000 per acre. If we take 10 acres on lease, the profit will be Rs.3 million. But if rot occurs, all of it is gone. That Mathai lost Rs.20 million last year. Koya had lost Rs.30 million. It is all about luck.

Mathai, who we met in the opening part of the chapter, did not tell me that he had suffered losses. Success determined social standing as an entrepreneur, a male, and an upper-caste person in Wayanad, prompting the farmers to try out ginger despite losses.

Shedding Historical Baggage

This section delves into the recent processes through which the Paniyas were deemed superfluous in the ginger sector. The Paniyas were already familiar with ginger, a traditional crop of Wayanad, making them the preferred labourers when the ginger enterprise opened up in the early 1990s. The local labourers of Karnataka would have had to be trained in the delicate work of tending the crop. The daily wage in Karnataka was Rs.50 per male worker back in 1999, against a significantly higher amount in Kerala (Mathrubhumi 1999b). Thus, the Paniyas were preferred over the local labourers even though the latter were cheaper. All parts of ginger farming were manual back then, demanding expert care. As Mathai mentioned, the Paniyas were already working in the farms of Syrian Christians in Wayanad. Thus, this old link between the two communities and their familiarity with the crop was transferred to the ginger farms in Karnataka. The speculative nature of the enterprise meant that labourers were needed whenever there was a sudden jump in prices. The old connections with the Paniyas meant that these skilled labourers were readily available whenever the farmers required them.

When the Syrian Christians started to arrive in Wayanad as settlers, the Paniyas had already been reduced to agricultural bonded labourers who were exchanged for a price between the landlords. The Syrian Christians can be said to have introduced wage labour in farming in Wayanad. In the 1990s, when the agrarian crisis hit Wayanad, it affected Paniyas, just as it did the landowning farmers. The agrarian crisis, landlessness, and old labour ties with landowning Syrian Christian households made the Paniyas a ready source of labour for ginger work when the trend started in the 1990s. Velliyamma put this historical relationship emphatically in these words: "They have been taking us away for work *kaalaakaalamaayi* (for ages). For ginger, the trend of taking us away began only in the 1990s."

There were no middlemen in this affair. Labourers were given an upfront amount, anywhere between Rs.2,000 to Rs.5,000, which was later deducted from the wages. Geetha, whom we met in the previous chapters, had a sister who went for ginger work with this payment offered by a Syrian Christian farmer from her neighbourhood. Geetha recounted that only half the wages were paid to her sister after three months of work: "She came back. I called up the *chettan* and shouted at him. We Adivasis need to stand up to them and shout if we have to get our rightful wages." Thus, advance payments, which have been recorded as a widespread practice across India (Guerin, Venkatasubramanian, and Michiels 2018), are not the only form in which labour is kept tied; labourers are made to wait until wages are paid as the farmers are well aware of the absence of alternative livelihoods for the Paniyas.

In the wake of the other livelihoods becoming insecure, ginger seemed to provide an alternative. Since the Paniyas had participation in the labour unions in Kerala, they had managed to receive the same wages in the ginger farms of Karnataka as they did in Kerala. They were also provided food and shelter. However, the transaction with the capitalist farmers started to become increasingly violent. As Velliyamma noted:

> The *mudalalimaar* ("capitalists") thrashed our kids at work. It did not work with me. I asked them why they did that. Just in that house, a Paniya man was taken for work. The next thing we saw was his dead body. It was three at night. Two boys from the Maadampuram colony nearby were also killed. I asked the *chettan* why that was done to them. The *chettan* threatened me, saying that I should not open my mouth; if I did, we will all be killed. He still lives there (pointing to a two-storeyed house). He is also a leader of the Congress. Adivasis have no leader.

This prevalence of violence was attested to by many other respondents and activists who pointed out how deaths and alcoholism had become rampant in the Paniya colonies with the migration to the ginger farms. Another Paniya woman I met in her colony noted, "My father's brother came back the other day; his one hand is now motionless. He fell unconscious there. He also drank a lot. Another man, Noonjan, also died recently in the other colony after going there."

Alcohol was emerging as a repeated theme in the conversations, especially how it shaped the relations between the two communities over decades. Tony, the Syrian Christian banker, recounted:

> Every Nair *tharavadu* (joint household) had colonies of Adivasis here. They were paid in kind – one *naazhi* (a measure) rice grains. This in-kind system changed when the Travancore migrants arrived. That is when payment in wages, in cash, started to be given, along with food and other things. But with this started another trend – providing alcohol. This has aggravated with the advent of ginger farming in Karnataka. Now they are 100 percent addicts – from the children to the elders. If this goes on like this, there won't be any men left in the Paniya colonies…In my childhood, Paniya labourers used to come home for work – they were the healthiest people around. Now they cannot even stand up as a result of going to the ginger farms. They start to drink right after they open their eyes and before they pick up the spade.

While Tony could be exaggerating when he says that no Paniya men would be left, and is partaking in the stigmatisation of the Paniyas as addicted to alcohol, his words bring out how the stigmatisation came up in the first place – alcohol became a part of the unequal exchange between the two communities over time. Alcohol use has been noted as a reason for deteriorating health indicators among the Paniyas by medical studies as well (Haddad et al. 2012, Mohindra et al. 2011). Velliyamma corroborated this trend:

> Nowadays the Paniyas do consume alcohol. In those days, they did not. Some people go to the farmers and say, we have worked for the whole day, give us a little. So they give. These days, it is alcohol all the time. Both men and women have a quarter (180ml) or two when they go. If we go to Kodagu, *nammal kulam thondi pokum* (roughly, "we will perish"). If we Paniyas get into a fight there, drunk or not, we won't be left alive. We won't be able to go complain. There is never a police case. The brother-in-law of my youngest son died like that.

The use of alcohol as a means of labour extraction is thus common in the ginger farms. A local Non-Governmental Organisation found 34 suspicious cases of deaths and 36 cases of occupational deaths among Adivasi labourers who went to work in the ginger farms (Times of India 2013). The district collector of Wayanad was compelled to issue an order restricting the use of labour from the Paniyas and other landless Adivasis.[33]

As my conversation with Mathai at his house proceeded, he let me in on the history of the Ginger Farmers Collective. He mentioned that discussions around forming a collective began around the time ginger farmers started to make their fortunes. In his view, this made the local landowners jealous, prompting them to ask for higher lease amounts or to steal ginger. But the collective was finally formed, Mathai says, when the threat came from their own

[33] As was noted in Chapter 3, the collector is the top civil servant of the district with powers over a wide range of subjects.

labourers – the Paniyas. Early on, allegations had come up that the Paniyas taken to Karnataka were made to live in deplorable conditions. Mathai rejected this:

> When some of the farmers who went from here (Wayanad) made a lot of money there (Karnataka) all of a sudden, stories were spread about us being involved in the workers' *chooshanam* (harassment/exploitation). Some of it is just jealousy. In some ginger farms, sexual harassment might have happened. But that happens everywhere. It is here as well as there. But there is no harassment. As far as alcohol is concerned, those who already had the habit of consuming alcohol have more when they go to Karnataka because no one from home gets to know about it. They still like to come to us. Ask any worker who went with me, they will say they were very happy with us.

Mathai recounted that the collective was finally formed in the year 2010 in these circumstances to counter the allegations. That the collective was formed with a combative goal became clearer from his mention that the collective was not registered – an idea brought up by Mathai himself. "If we register, we will have to declare how much wealth the organisation has. Also, if we register, anyone can sue us. Otherwise it is just a loose group of people," Mathai pointed out. This was one of the defining moments when the Paniyas were perceived to be baggage from the old times. Carrying over the baggage of old caste relations to Karnataka was proving to be a trouble for the Wayanadan farmers.

That the links with the Paniyas had become baggage became clearer when I attended the annual meeting of the collective in Wayanad, where close to a hundred members were present. Mathai was at the forefront, welcoming everyone:

> For the chief guests, for those who are new and for those who did not get to attend our previous meetings, let me recap how this collective was formed. Eight or ten years ago, the Wayanad collector, revenue authorities, the Scheduled Tribe commission and the Women's Commission inspected the ginger farm of a farmer called Baby in Periyapatna, based on reports that the

> Adivasis were facing *chooshanam* (harassment) in the farms. The next day news came that the Adivasis and the farmers had separate sources of water, that the Adivasis were being harassed. There were other such *apahasyaparamaya vakkukal* ("insulting words") written against the farmers. Many of you present here have gone to the soil of Karnataka for 25 years and toiled and contributed to Wayanad's economy and social sector. The farmers were insulted. That was the time when this organisation was formed.

Thus, the farmers were feeling increasingly insecure about having the Paniyas as labourers. Newspaper archives corroborate this point and suggest that anxiety among ginger farmers about enquiries regarding working conditions had begun already in the early 2000s. In 2001, a Planters Association was convened in Wayanad by the ginger farmers to collectively raise their voice against the allegations; the meeting claimed that Wayanad's labourers, especially the Adivasis, were "protected" by the ginger farmers (Mathrubhumi 2001b). Farmers said they continued cultivation even when prices were not favourable and provided *thanal* (shade) to the crisis-struck Adivasis, and hence they could not understand the protests from Adivasi organisations (*ibid.*). Three days later, an Adivasi Federation met in the district, where representatives from Adivasi communities pointed out that many ginger farmers had themselves conceded that the Adivasis were given alcohol at work and thoroughly harassed. The meeting noted that the Adivasis had to go to the ginger farms out of desperation when the price of traditional crops in Wayanad fell steeply (Mathrubhumi 2001a).

Around the same time, the land struggles of the Adivasis were gaining wide attention. The *Kudilketti Samaram* of 2001 and the Muthanga *Sambhavam* of 2003 (Chapter 3) were flashpoints when the possibility of the landless Adivasis mobilising under autonomous social movements like the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha sent a clear message that the oppression and harassment of the Adivasis would not be tolerated. These land struggles not only brought up the issue of oppression back home but also highlighted the ginger farms as a particularly

oppressive site of work. *Injipaadam* (the ginger farm) came up as a repeated symbol of the Paniyas' marginalisation in several conversations I had with Adivasi activists.

The perception of the Paniyas as baggage also came out in the form of stigmas that the affluent communities attached to the Paniyas. As was discussed in Chapter 3, all over Wayanad (and Kerala) a colony was seen as a place of degeneration and as lacking values. Babu, the Wayanadan farmer we met before in his farm in Karnataka, observed:

> The reason why labourers from Kerala are not coming anymore is that from Kerala, it is mostly the Adivasi communities that came. *Anusaranakkedu*! (disobedience). If you bring men and women, there will be quarrels in the shed. There is no husband and wife; anyone can be the husband and anyone the wife. We left them all. If they don't have work in Wayanad, let the government give them work. If we bring them here, we provide them sheds, 50m apart, one for women and one for men. But by midnight, those from this shed will go there and those from there come here. We can't sleep. If we don't give them alcohol, that day they will kill us.

Thus, feeling the need to leave behind the decades-old links with the Paniyas has been clearly building up. Babu noted that with the Waddar, he had to just ask for the work to be done; the Waddar did not form a liability. He kept repeating that the Paniyas would attack the farmers if they were not given alcohol. This kind of scorn towards the Paniyas, many of whom the farmers knew well from their neighbourhood (from childhood even), came out in the testimonies of several other ginger farmers. Abraham's tone was categorical:

> *Adivasiyenna sambhavathe thanne ingottu aduppikkarilla* (I do not let the very thing called the Adivasi come this side). Firstly, they are totally into alcohol when they come here. They lose all sense when they are drunk. Also, they don't work well at all, although we pay Rs.500. That

> Wadda woman there, her wage is Rs.150. Paniya women will have to be given Rs.350-400. The Waddar don't have to be given any other expenses. They also work better than our people.[34]

Reading the fieldnotes together, it emerged that the lower cost of the Waddar's labour, while an important factor, was often cited as an excuse to justify the distancing from the Paniyas. The wages demanded by the Paniyas were always higher, and the wage reason was often cited after expressing anger and scorn towards the Paniyas.

The (abysmally) low wage of the Waddar also indicated how easily their labour could be extracted. This was often characterised euphemistically by the farmers as evidence of the high skill/productivity level of the Waddar. As Abraham noted:

> They eat rats! But they work really hard. They can work 24 hours. They come here and work for five to six months, and go back and spend all that money in one night on a festival or something in their village. They come again. Sometimes we ourselves feel like crying seeing them do this *adima pani* (roughly, slave labour). They bring their children too for work. Now the situation is such that without Waddar, we won't exist. Once I asked Ramesh, "Would you be able to do it?" He said, "*Naanu Waddaru makkalu* (I belong to a Waddar family), I can do it."

Ramesh was the *mestri*, the representative of the Waddar who takes up a contract for work. The *mestri* comes from within the group. A typical contract at the time of fieldwork gave the *mestri* Rs.50,000 per acre for a period of six months to do all the work. The *mestri* then brought his labourers in numbers that he felt were sufficient to get the work done. He also divided the wages among the group. The Waddar workers whom I interviewed came from the arid region of Arasikere in Hassan district. They had traditionally worked in work involving the soil such as digging wells and tanks and to some extent agriculture. This kind of recruitment meant that

[34] "Our people" was used by Abraham to refer to the Paniyas as he was speaking in Malayalam to this researcher, who is also from Kerala.

as the farmers moved to newer lands, they could either work through the *mestri*, who brought new labourers every time, or find a new *mestri* from the nearest town to get labourers. Thus, the relation between the farmers and the labourers here does not accrue the kind of historical baggage as it does with the Paniyas.

Meanwhile, agrarian crisis and water scarcity in interior Karnataka have left the Waddar desperate for alternative work. This was when the ginger sector opened up. The desperation was stark in the voice of a Wadda woman whom I interviewed next to a makeshift tent that her community had put up along the National Highway in wait for work (figure 5.3). She said: "Without ginger work, there is no food. The Kerala farmers make all the money, we know that, but they gave us work, taught us how to do ginger. Without Kerala farmers we are nothing."



Figure 5.3: Temporary tents of the Waddar. Image by the author.

The overall picture emerging here is that of two communities, each facing marginalisation linked to their caste-class location and each undergoing struggles with agrarian changes unique to their scenario, being brought into the ginger farms. The ginger farms, in turn, present a site where capital works in such a way that the livelihood struggles of the two communities come face-to-face, with the effect that the Paniyas are rendered surplus. The gradual replacement of the Paniya labour is a move on part of the farmers to shed their historical

baggage when the Paniyas' resistance was perceived as a threat – the farmers wanted labour to be "free" in the complete sense, without the historical links, to aid its limitless exploitation. The case study showed how their social locations of caste were key to the shaping of this process: although Paniya labour was always more expensive than that of the Waddar, the former was preferred until recently, when the farmers increasingly felt the historical links between them and the Paniyas were a burden.

The Waddar were incorporated for their traditional skills in working with the earth at a time of desperation for work. However, the distanced nature of their recruitment and the tendency of ginger farming to recruit a new set of labourers as it moved ensured the interactions and unequal transactions between them and the farms did not stick on to become baggage. The current movement of ginger farming into the central Indian provinces of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand could potentially elaborate further how this form of capitalist expansion in the countryside feeds on the labour provided by one marginalised community after another: labourers in the central Indian provinces are likely to be local Adivasis who already live with the threat of eviction from their land by development projects, and who are further removed from any historical links with the Wayanadan farmers.

Agrarian Moral Economies

The transformation in the relations between the Syrian Christians and the Paniyas can be gauged in terms of notional changes in the moral economy that prevailed in Wayanad. With its roots in E.P. Thompson's study of collective action around food shortages in eighteenth-century England, the idea of moral economy may be broadly understood as the informal notions of traditional rights and social justice held by a people (Thompson 1971). For Thompson, such informal notions may be supported by "some measure of license by the authorities" (ibid., p.79), indicating that formal recognition can strengthen the prevalent notions of the moral economy. The clash between these notions and any intruding force or idea that threatens them

may lead to disturbance and overt forms of resistance. Alternatively, it may also lead to a scenario wherein those at the lower end of the power spectrum may have to accept the changes brought to the traditional system or resist the changes through more covert means (Scott 1976).

The employment of the Paniyas in the ginger farms despite their high wages, premised on generations of loyalty to the farmers, trustworthiness, and expertise in tending ginger, hints at a certain obligation that existed on the farmers to hire local labourers in Wayanad. Paying the high wages of the Paniyas, realised through the 1970s' labour mobilisations in the province, had become a part of this notion of obligation. This system was threatened by a combination of events. The Paniyas' rise against their oppression and landlessness through popular land struggles and against the labour conditions in the ginger farms prompted the farmers to switch to the cheap local labourers in Karnataka. Breman (1996) notes that in central Gujarat, the moral economy that bound the landowners and labourers – patron and clients – dissipated with the changes in the overall economy such as a greater movement of the native labourers (as footloose labourers) to places outside the village, in-migration of labourers from outside, and the consequent dissolution of any obligation of the landowners to hire local labourers. These slow changes are found in the case of the Paniyas in Wayanad as well, with the slight contrast that they have not become footloose. The changes can be gauged from the views of Velliyamma and her grandson regarding ginger work. We can see in Velliyamma's words that she considered Mathai to be like her own son the expectation that the Syrian Christians and other upper-caste farmers provide work to the Paniyas. Velliyamma's grandson, quoted at the end of the previous chapter, angrily stated that there was no future in farm work and there was no point expecting anything from the ginger farmers. He opted to go for a skill development course, indicating the need to move away from traditional agrarian relations.

It is important here to note that there was no *uniform* moral economy to be found among the Paniyas (as also noted by Breman and Scott). The relations with the upper-caste farmers

were always oppressive: many Paniya respondents indicated this to me by referring to *valli*, the feudal system of bonded labour wherein the labourers were paid in grains, a system that existed in Wayanad until around four decades ago. The resistance is also scattered, as Bremen too notes in the case of his villages in Gujarat (where the scenario is attributed to the circular migration of the labourers). While the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha is the most visible expression of the resistance of the landless Adivasis, many of the Adivasis have joined the CPI(M)'s Adivasi Kshema Samithi, the INC's Adivasi Congress, or other autonomous groups. Some others, like Velliyamma, have not joined any political group, but have instead used the instruments available at their disposal (anger and questioning the farmers) to express resistance.

Wolford (2005) extends the notion of moral economy to refer to the "moral arguments (ideal models or ideology)" held by *any* section of society, regardless of their position in the power spectrum, in so far as these arguments pertain to the ways in which various social groups define the "optimal organisation of society," including the division of productive resources. Wolford argues that extending the notion of moral economy to the powerful in society helps understand how they justify the changes they bring about in the overall moral economy of a society based on obligations and also understand how the justifications are legitimised through formal measures taken up by the state. In this sense, it is easy to see that the Syrian Christian farmers' moral economy notions are shaped by the idea of improving land, generating profits, masculinity, and a certain belief in their superior status that should go unthreatened. The tears shed for the Waddar labourers who "work like slaves" attest to this. Moral economy notions are justified through claims that each section finds objective; for the farmers, the wage differential between the Paniyas and the Waddar gave an easy excuse to justify the employment of a set of labourers that can be easily disciplined.

A Relational Analysis

To make better sense of the processes through which the Paniyas found themselves superfluous from the ginger farming enterprise, I take the help of insights from Tilly's exposition of categorical inequality (1998) and Mosse's (2010) application of Tilly's framework to an analysis of the discrimination against Adivasis and Dalits in labour markets in India. The Paniyas' experience of becoming surplus from the ginger sector, as demonstrated in the previous sections, is rooted in the caste-class relations they had with respect to the Syrian Christians back home. These unequal caste-class relations developed between the settlers and the labourers through decades of unequal transactions since the former arrived in Wayanad in the 1940s. As Tilly (2001) notes, "negotiated social relations" are important to understanding inequality. Inequality here is produced through "asymmetrical social interactions," wherein benefits accrue to one side. The analysis attempted here is *not* an effort to provide an alternative framework to that of caste and class, but to understand more closely how long-standing caste and class relations operated in the organisational set-up of the ginger farm. Tilly's own framework did not attempt to provide an alternative: as Wright (1994) points out, Tilly's framework can be characterised as an "enrichment" of Marxian class analysis.[35]

Tilly's attempt was to provide an explanation for how inequalities that exist in society based on categories, such as ethnicity, race, or gender (or, arguably, caste), are reproduced in new setups and become durable over the course of time. Tilly notes that inequality becomes durable because those who control resources use categories to solve organisational problems. The definition of an organisation in Tilly's treatment is quite broad and can comprise of "all sorts of well-bounded clusters of social relations in which occupants of at least one position has the right to commit resources to activities reaching across the boundary" (Tilly 1998, 9).

[35] Tilly had characterised his own work on durable inequality as a fusion of Marxian theory of exploitation and Weberian social closure.

Organisations can include not only corporations and governments, but also households, clans, plantations, peasant communes, and even nation-states.

In Tilly's framework, inequality becomes institutionalised through four mechanisms: exploitation of surplus labour, hoarding of opportunities, emulation of the society's inequalities in the organisational set-up, and adaptation. Adaptation refers to the arrangement of all daily routines within the set-up around the categorically unequal structures. It might be argued that long-standing categorical inequalities like that of caste getting emulated in an organisational set-up like the ginger farm is hardly surprising, given the blurred boundaries between the farm and the external society. Here it is important to note that Tilly himself did not treat the boundaries as defined, and accounted for the fact that long-standing categories "accumulate their own histories" (*ibid.*, p.12) and tend to be replicated in every social context.

Taking the Paniyas as labourers in the ginger farms was initially based on historical ties. The Syrian Christians could have trained the local labourers in Karnataka (as they are doing now) to reduce the (monetary) costs of employing labour, but instead, they employed the Paniyas, who demanded higher wages. The Paniyas' skills in agricultural labour, especially their familiarity with ginger, and their long-standing position as labourers to farmer households were all transferred when they were taken over to the ginger farms. This meant the emulation of the caste-class relations between the two communities in the ginger farms. The means of labour extraction used, including advance payments and alcohol, keep the opportunities on the ginger farm "hoarded," such that the Paniyas can never rise to become ginger entrepreneurs. The absence of the Paniyas in any supervisory role after three decades of work in this sector is indicative of this scenario.

When the resistance from the Paniyas to their oppression in the ginger farm tended to gain strength, the cost of keeping the Paniyas was suddenly found to be excessive. For Tilly,

costs and returns not only mean monetised goods and services but also a range of valued transactions. The cost for the farmers involved getting dragged into court cases and having to answer media queries about the harassment. From the earlier categorisation of the Paniyas as skilled, trustable workers, the farmers now started to employ in their outlook the stigmatisation of the Paniyas as alcoholics, lazy, and indulging in what they considered illicit sexual relationships. "The most dramatic forms of categorisation involve outright stigma," notes Tilly (*ibid.*, p.65). The stigmatisation too was an opportunistic emulation of the stigmatisation of the Paniyas that already existed in Wayanad. The Waddar were now brought in as the trustworthy workers whose "slave labour" brought tears in the eyes of the capitalist farmers, to draw on farmer Abraham's words. While taking in the Waddar, the basic structure of the ginger farm, involving exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation, was maintained. But the arrangement involving the Paniyas was deemed too costly. For Tilly, a given system of categorical inequality loses force when exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, or adaptation becomes too costly (cost being not just economic). In the ginger farm, replacement of the Paniyas with a community, which, unlike the Paniyas, did not have labour union participation, and therefore was unlikely to report or leave in the wake of labour exploitation and harassment, became the way of maintaining the system, still based on categorical inequality.

The recruitment of the Waddar through the *mestris* helped this process further. As Mosse (2010) notes, "identity effects" (meaning, the discrimination meted out to a group because of its identity) are reinforced through labour recruitment mechanisms. This is commonly found in South Asia as in the instances of the *mukkadams* (local name of middlemen) recruiting Bhil Adivasis for construction work in Gujarat, middlemen recruiting Dalit workers in brick kilns in Tamil Nadu, or *mastaans* (local name of middlemen) in Dhaka recruiting the urban poor for a variety of jobs as well as controlling access to services like

shelter, water, electricity, and protection. While the middlemen, who are often from within the community, serve as a voice to the concerns of the rest before the employers, they have themselves emerged out of intense competition. This observation can be applied to the Waddar *mestris* as well. The labour process on the ginger farm has now been adapted around the status of the Waddar as superexploited labourers recruited through *mestris*. Mosse notes that there is no need to prove intentionality on the part of the oppressors. Even if there are no deliberate attempts to subordinate marginalised parties, unequal categories work to create different opportunities. Stereotyping Adivasi migrants as backward and uncivilised or Dalits as impure are common instances.

Tilly's framework, as stylised as it may be, is not only useful in examining closely how caste-class inequalities get reproduced, but also how they come to be challenged. To a limited extent, the framework accommodates the possibility of unrest. Tilly provides two possible scenarios: a change in the political dispensation ruling a society that attempts to change the unequal structures (Tilly gives a detailed analysis of the end of the apartheid in South Africa as an example) or through social movements. Tilly argues that social movements function by convincing their members that they are worthy, united, numerous, and committed. The organised as well as the leaderless land struggles of the Paniyas could be considered a case whereby the farmers were alerted to the fact that the Paniyas were not unrepresented. Note that this messaging did not result in a settlement between the farmers and the Paniyas. In fact, desperation for livelihood still pushes some Paniyas to go to the farms for any available work; contacts in the field informed me of a Paniya man's suspicious death in the farms as recently as May 2021, indicating that the work conditions have hardly improved in the farms.

The messaging can be understood in terms of the agenda-setting power, as noted by Mosse (2010). In this formulation, inequality persists because the concerns of the oppressed go unpoliticised in terms of two aspects: representation in decision-making platforms, and control

over the discourse governing the unequal conditions. Formal representation of the Paniyas in electoral politics was indeed limited; although two of the three seats from Wayanad that elect Members to Kerala's Legislative Assembly are reserved for Adivasis, both have been occupied by the landowning Kurichya community despite their numbers being only a fraction of that of the Paniyas. The land struggles of the landless Adivasis, both organised and unorganised, can be said to have brought into this scenario an attempt to change the discourse. This was done by highlighting the oppression of landless communities like the Paniyas, including their harassment in the ginger farms. Though the working conditions in the ginger farms still did not receive any wide public attention, the ginger farmers were clearly made aware of the possibility of opposition from the Adivasis gaining strength if the working conditions remained adverse for the latter. For the Syrian Christians, the replacement of the Paniyas with the Waddar served as a means of adapting to this possibility.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to understand how agrarian changes in two locations interact in the form of a capitalist venture in ginger farming based on speculation over prices. The ginger venture has many more layers. It presented a false agrarian escape that initially seemed to provide an alternative from agriculture through agriculture, working out only for a handful of the capitalist farmers. Ginger farms were a meeting point: they brought together multiple layers of agrarian changes underway in two locations that led to the movement of capital and labour from one rural location (Wayanad) to another (villages of Karnataka). It also brought together stakeholders with specific social locations and land histories. This chapter argued that understanding how these aspects pan out is crucial to gauge how new avenues of agrarian accumulation get configured. By zooming in on the circumstances that led to the replacement of one labourer community by another, the chapter gave an account of the moments through which the former was made surplus to the needs of capital. Shedding of historical baggage

came out as a key process through which circuits of capital interact with caste hierarchies, the implication being that the Paniyas are further pushed into struggles for land and livelihood. The brewing resistance of the Paniyas to their oppression on the ginger farm was perceived by the farmers as a threat, prompting the latter to replace the former.

Further, the ginger story reveals the situated nature of a surplus population. That Paniya migration to the ginger farms occurred in the largest numbers from the 1990s until recently confirms that the welfare system, unionisation, decentralisation of power, and other characteristics of Kerala's development experiments had not protected the Paniyas from this route of seeking alternative livelihood. The affluent social groups, the main beneficiaries of the model, turned into capitalist farmers who still needed the landless Paniyas to work in their farms – until these old relations were no longer desirable. Implicitly, the chapter indicated how the ginger story is intricately connected with the post-agrarian path of development that Kerala is currently on, a path that brings forth new avenues of agrarian capitalism. These new avenues have consequences for the Paniyas' livelihoods – mechanisms explored in this chapter work towards eventually expelling them from these new sources of livelihoods, perpetuating their struggles. The perpetual struggles prompt demands for land that need to be managed and controlled through the work of the state, a theme I explore in the next chapter.

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6 | Landfare to Welfare

In Irulam, Wayanad, close to 50 shacks lay scattered below teak trees on the slope of a hill, a sight that could not be missed while passing through the road that cuts through the hill (figure 6.1).[36] The land struggle had been on for more than 12 years. While enquiring about this struggle to Paniya respondents in other colonies, I received the response that it was "*sarkarinte bhoosamaram*" (the government's land struggle). The struggle was organised under the banner of the Adivasi Kshema Samithi ("Adivasi welfare forum") or AKS, the Adivasi wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The party led the provincial government during the fieldwork period and had also been in power once before during the span of the Irulam struggle. That the Adivasi wing of the party would run a struggle demanding land from its own government for more than a decade, compelling the participants of the struggle to live in shacks without basic amenities, lent the struggle a performative quality that evoked dismissal from other Adivasis. This led them to label it the government's land struggle. The participants of the struggle simply said that they had squatted on land that they later realised was categorised as forests and thus not open for distribution. They decided to continue the struggle regardless. While it was understandable that the AKS had to conduct land struggles to stay on as the voice of landless Adivasis, especially in the wake of the rise of autonomous social movements, the length of the struggle, spanning more than a decade, calls for attention to be paid to the reasons for the non-provision of alternative land. This is especially so because it was clear that the participants' demands had been placed before the government through its leaders, who were members of the ruling party. Further, the continuing landlessness of the Adivasis in the

[36] The teak trees are a "legacy" of the colonial rule that turned natural forests into timber plantations.

province despite two rival coalitions alternating in power necessitates a study that goes beyond the problems with anyone party (usually explained as the Communist parties' ambivalence to the specific experiences of landless Adivasis) into the finer details of the process of implementing land distribution.



Figure 6.1: Land struggle shacks in Irulam. Image by the author.

This chapter examines Kerala's land distribution efforts with respect to the Adivasis. The chapter demonstrates that these efforts are paradoxically reproducing Adivasi landlessness, and thereby the colonies. Three modalities of this process are identified: reduction of landlessness into a workable figure, projectisation of the process of ending landlessness, and withholding of available land. The larger implication is that tension can be read between the Adivasis' claims for land and the state's response. The response comes in the form of scattered, half-hearted efforts of providing (or not providing) land, along with an injection of welfare programmes into the colonies. In parallel the chapter also shows that while the state is "responsive," in the sense that overtly the two political fronts show they are taking steps to address landlessness, a closer inspection shows that they have been active in diluting the land

distribution agenda to the extent that land provision now looks like another limited welfare measure, performing the function of merely subsidising the cost of reproduction of labour power. Despite these trends, land struggles consistently organised by the Paniyas and other landless Adivasi communities make sure that the state is not allowed to depoliticise the issue of landlessness. Figure 6.2 provides a map of the land struggles and land distribution sites mentioned in this chapter.



Figure 6.2: Map of major land struggle and land distribution sites. Locations are approximate.

How Many Landless Adivasis?

I am in a Tribal Extension Office (TEO) in Kannur district, close to the Aralam land distribution project. To recap, the TEO is the lowest level of the bureaucratic machinery operating under the provincial government's Scheduled Tribes Development Department and works through a network of frontline agents called the "tribal promoters." Aralam is one of the sites where land was parcelled out under an agreement between the provincial government and Adivasi leaders after the *Kudilketti Samaram* ("struggle by erecting shacks") that took place in the provincial capital Thiruvananthapuram in 2001. I have come to seek the help of the tribal promoters to locate those Adivasi households that abandoned the land they had received in Aralam and are now living in their old colonies. The Tribal Extension Officer has not come in yet, so I strike a conversation with the promoters. They are in a hurry. The officer is going to Thiruvananthapuram tomorrow to attend a meeting at the Directorate of Scheduled Tribes Development, the headquarters of the department bureaucracy. The promoters have been asked to submit statistics on the colonies under them, including on landlessness. They have all been given tablets. There is panic. No one is sure how to collect the data in such a short interval. "This job is a joke," one of them remarks. They expect a long night with the tablets, filling in numbers from memory.

Various ministers in charge of the Scheduled Tribes Development Department have been reporting figures on Adivasi landlessness periodically in the Legislative Assembly. In 2008, the directorate conducted a "socio-economic survey" covering various variables of social development among the Adivasis. The survey curiously puts the number of landless households at a low 5,158 (STDD 2008). The number of landless Paniya households is given as 1,689 or a mere seven percent of all Paniya households. At the same time, the report admits that "10,517 landless families are yet to be allotted land" (*ibid.*, p.168). This internal contradiction between the figures on the number of landless households and the number of households yet to be

allotted land begins to show the problems with the state's data on Adivasi landlessness. There is neither a definition of landlessness nor an explanation of the data collection method in the report. It is not clear whether it was a census or a sample survey, or as the vignette above shows, last-minute form filling by tribal promoters. Probably in the realisation that the figure of 5,158 is absurdly low, the ministers in charge of the department have been reporting figures around 10,000 in the Legislative Assembly Question-and-Answer sessions in the past decade. Archives of these sessions present such figures around 10,000, based on data collected by the directorate through its bureaucracy in 2011, 2014, 2015, and 2017 (KLA 2013, 2015, 2016, 2018a).

The misrepresentation of the data on landlessness signals the obfuscation of data by the state that is well noted in scholarship. Using the Employment and Unemployment Survey 2011-12 of the National Sample Survey Organisation, Yadu (2015) estimates the number of landless Adivasi households in Kerala as 21.2 percent of all Adivasi households, or close to 23,000 households. The sample considered a household with less than 2.5 cents (0.025 acres) of land as landless. This sample survey did not consider the differences between specific Adivasi communities and hence may not have ensured proportional representation of various communities. If the Paniyas, the largest landless Adivasi community, were underrepresented in the sample, the survey results on landlessness are likely to be an underestimation. Activists put the number at a higher figure of close to 50,000 households. Moreover, households that have abandoned the land distributed to them because of uninhabitable conditions are not counted in the state's surveys. This means that the state is working with questionable data on Adivasi landlessness and then expending its efforts and monies on tackling *this* landlessness. Such reduction of Adivasi landlessness into a workable target figure of around 10,000 households is the first way in which Adivasi landlessness is allowed to perpetuate. The story of Palakkode described at the beginning of the thesis clearly shows how multiple generations

of a household have been excluded from these data collection drives and have been forced to continue living in the colonies. The reduction of this complex experience of perpetual landlessness (or in the case of those who are forced to abandon distributed land, reproduced landlessness) into a workable target paves the way for the next modality of the state's approach to tackling landlessness: projectising the eradication of landlessness.

Projectisation

With the agenda of land reforms now a matter of the past, the idea of eradicating Adivasi landlessness is being dealt with through development projects that work towards the target of reducing the state-enumerated figure of landless households to zero. This target-bound reduction of addressing Adivasi landlessness through projects, run with dedicated funds and functionaries, and devoid of an understanding of the multidirectional livelihood expulsions faced by the Adivasis or the varied power imbalances embedded therein, is referred to as "projectisation" here. Over the years, these projects have developed their own lexicon. The projects take the form of legislation, "missions," "and "schemes." While schemes run for longer periods, "missions" are undertaken with set deadlines and targets (say, zero landlessness by the end of the government's term) and specially recruited functionaries.

Most of the projects are implemented through an elaborate bureaucracy, stretching from the provincial capital to the colonies, as described in detail in Chapter 2. A quick overview will be worthwhile. The Directorate of Scheduled Tribes Development at the top watches over 10 Tribal Development Offices and seven Integrated Tribal Development Plan offices spread across the province. These offices have their arms further spread out through 53 Tribal Extension Offices. Each extension office hires around 20 tribal promoters on contract for two years. The bureaucracy also manages a number of residential schools, health clinics, skill development centres, and youth accommodation for its target population. For participatory governance, state-facilitated village assemblies of Adivasi adults called *oorukoottams* are

organised in areas with a sizeable Adivasi population. The land distribution efforts are complemented with a wide array of welfare programmes that cover every stage of the lifecycle – from infancy to old age – as well as every requirement of life – from nutrition, health, and education to livelihood, leisure, and life insurance. Kerala spends over two percent of its annual budget (2.83 percent in the 2019-20 budget) on Adivasis – higher than the percentage of Adivasi population in the province (1.45 percent) (GoK 2019a). Projectisation of land distribution sets in motion the bureaucratic machinery that works on finding land, inviting applications, verifying claims, and granting documents called *kaivasharekha*. This document is also known commonly as a Record of Right, though it is more precisely a certificate of temporary possession, far short of a land title. As will be shown below, these projects have been failing to address Adivasi landlessness, many a time pushing land recipients back into the colonies. This scenario triggers land struggles.

Ferguson (1990) had observed in the context of Lesotho that the projectisation of development issues by international development agencies tends to depoliticise the issues of poverty and inequality. Rallying against such a myopic view of development that does not attempt to understand people's own perspectives about their lives, Ferguson exposed how the governmentality envisaged by these development projects was destined to fail. In Lesotho, the failure was seen in the lack of interest among the people to take up the projects actively, which could be read as a form of public response to the depoliticisation. In a case of slight contrast, in Kerala, we see the active engagement of the Adivasis and their movements with the idea of welfare, landfare, and development in general. The landless Adivasis erupting in land struggles can be read as an active opposition to the scenario of projectisation (the opposition is to the overall effect of projectisation, *viz*. continuing landlessness, rather than to individual instances of projectisation).

I identify the *Kudilketti Samaram* as an important turning point when Adivasi landlessness became a major political issue. Hence the land distribution efforts are discussed in two subsections: before and after this struggle. An exhaustive account of all the projects is beyond the scope of the chapter; the focus here is on demonstrating how the projectised mode of ending landlessness fails to achieve its goals.

Land Distribution Projects Before Kudilketti Samaram

Land reforms in the province, implemented from the year 1970 onwards, did away with the complex hierarchy of tenancies that had earlier existed in the province (Herring 1980). Plantations, then a major employer, were excluded from the purview of the land reforms, ostensibly based on the argument that division of land would impact productivity negatively. The plantations are present all along the length of the province on the Western Ghats and are owned or managed mostly by private companies. As described in Chapter 3, the land reforms ended up excluding the landless Adivasi labourers as the focus of the reforms was on the component of converting tenancies into permanent ownership, rather than on providing housing plots to agricultural labourers.

One of the earliest experiments in "rehabilitating" (the term used by the state) Adivasis was undertaken in Cheengeri, Wayanad, in 1957, soon after the formation of the province of Kerala. The provincial government, led by the undivided Communist Party of India then, bought 526 acres of land from the central government using funds under the heads of Scheduled Tribe development and set up a farm. The Cheengeri Tribal Project established thereafter brought in 120 landless Adivasi households, who would work as employees on the farm. Bureaucrats occupied the governing body and administrative positions and were hardly interested in making the project work for the Adivasis. The farm started to run on losses and salary payments got stalled (how such mismanagement actually plays out is elaborated in the

next chapter through an elaborate case study of the Aralam project). As a result, the resident households were forced to abandon the site and go back to live in the colonies they came from, outside the farm. Settlers from southern Kerala subsequently set up houses on these lands. In 1994, a group of Adivasis that included leader C.K. Janu led a protest march to the farm and demanded the distribution of the project land to the Adivasi residents. The government agreed to the distribution of half the land, retaining the other half for government offices and distribution to settlers. Rejecting this offer, 250 landless Adivasi households occupied the farm in 1995. The movement was crushed by the police. This was the Cheengeri land struggle, one of the most significant struggles in Wayanad led by an autonomous movement projecting the Adivasi identity.

The script of this "farm experiment" was repeated over and over in other land distribution projects; most of them ended up in failure due to bureaucratic mismanagement. During the national-level Emergency of 1975-77, announced by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, an array of steps that targeted Adivasis were taken as part of her twenty-point programme (remembered for its slogan *gharibi hatao* or eradicate poverty). In 1976, the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Bill was passed by the Parliament. Wayanad saw the setting up of a number of farms by the central and provincial governments that aimed at rehabilitating Adivasi labourers freed from bondage. The farms were to be run as cooperative societies that gave a share of the profits to the rehabilitated households. Thus, the following projects were set up: the Sugandhagiri cardamom project (1976), the Pookode dairy project, the Priyadarshini tea estate (1994) and a number of minor plantations in the district. The Sugandhagiri project, spread across 5,000 acres, stands as an illustration of the failure of such a project. The project came to be by "rehabilitating" 750 Adivasi households freed from bondage, mostly Paniyas. By 1999, only 350 households remained on the project site as the enterprise ran on losses (Mathrubhumi 1999d). Mismanagement of the project led to a scenario in which cardamom remained only on

300 acres, down from 3,800 acres at the beginning of the project. Finding livelihood became so difficult that an Adivasi resident died of starvation in 1992 (Mathrubhumi 1999e, 1999f). Internal disputes within the governing board between the bureaucrats and the representatives of the residents became common (Mathrubhumi 1999g). The failure of the project belied the initial promise that each Adivasi family would be able to save Rs.25,000 a year after all expenses (Mathrubhumi 1999h).

Another example of the farm experiment was implemented in Attappady, Palakkad district. In 1975, 2,700 acres of "vested forests" were assigned here to "rehabilitate" 420 Adivasi households (Attappady Cooperative Farming Society 2018).[37] This farm too was set up as a cooperative, wherein the land would be used for farming a range of cash crops like pepper, cardamom, coconut, and areca nut. The farm was proposed to be made profitable in five years, following which the land was to be distributed to the residents at the rate of five acres per household. The Adivasi households were included in the project as farm employees, with representation in the governing board as well as the right to a share of the profits generated. The governing board was headed by the district collector and by bureaucrats from the Scheduled Tribes Development Department. The project failed to take off, reducing the households to the status of wage labourers on their own land (Pratheesh 2014). The land remains undistributed and the cooperative continues to operate on losses. The project's own website says that the "society is working with the help of financial aid from the Scheduled Tribes Development Department under Government of Kerala as the income from agricultural crops is not sufficient to meet all the expenditure of the society" (Attappady Cooperative Farming Society 2018). The project is thus surviving on external money pumped into it from

[37] "Vested forests" refers to the category of forests that were isolated patches under private ownership or in wastelands and that were "vested in" (i.e. taken over by) the government in 1971 through the Kerala Private Forest (Vesting and Assignment) Act. The Act explicitly allowed distribution of such forest lands to members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This legislation is discussed in further detail in Section 3.

the budget funds meant for Adivasi development, a major chunk of which gets spent on the salaries of bureaucrats. A stone's throw away from here, the Vattalakki Girijan Cooperative Farming Society, spread over 1,100 acres, brought the same fate to 147 resettled Adivasi households (Mullappat 2018).

Besides the farm experiments, the second set of efforts undertaken to end Adivasi landlessness was through legislation. The Dhebar Commission (1960-61) appointed by the central government had recommended legislation restoring land alienated from Adivasis to the benefit of non-Adivasis. Such laws were passed in many provinces during the period of Emergency. In Kerala, the Scheduled Tribes (Restriction of Transfer and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act was passed in 1975 under the United Front government, which consisted of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Indian National Congress (INC).[38] The law stipulated the restoration of alienated land in full to the original Adivasi owner. The law further prohibited any transfer of land from an Adivasi to a non-Adivasi person after the commencement of the act. However, it remained on paper for over two decades. The High Court of Kerala repeatedly admonished the provincial governments in power for non-implementation, but a change, of course, was far from sight (Bijoy and Raman 2003). The transferees were settlers in the Adivasi regions from other parts of Kerala and were lobbying hard with the governments to do away with the law. An amendment to dilute the law was rejected by the president. In 1999, buckling under pressure from the settler groups, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government, consisting of the CPI(M) and the CPI, repealed the law altogether and replaced it with a new law – the Kerala Restriction on Transfer by and Restoration of Land to Scheduled Tribes Act.

[38] The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was in the opposition at the time.

The new law brought in five significant changes (Parmar 2018). Firstly, it dropped the word "alienated" from the title. This changed the discourse from correcting historical injustice to just forgetting injustice. Secondly, the new law applied only to agricultural lands. This erased the topic of alienated non-agricultural lands. It was done to do away with the requirement of seeking the president's approval as agricultural land was entirely under the province's jurisdiction. Thirdly, the new law stated that alienated lands below five acres did not have to be restored, i.e. such alienation would now be considered as a legal transfer. Many Adivasi households had fewer than five acres alienated and thus were excluded from the provision for restoration. Fourth, in the 1975 law, transfer was defined as "an act by which immovable property is conveyed by any documentary or oral transaction" that included "*voluntary surrender* and *abandonment*" (italics added for emphasis). Under the 1999 law, transfer was redefined as "the transfer made by any person belonging to the Scheduled Tribe of lands in his *ownership and possession* to a person other than a member of Scheduled Tribes." The inclusion of voluntary surrender in the 1975 law had taken care of the fact that deception might have been involved in the transfer of lands and that Adivasis might not have had sufficient documentation of the transfer. The new law placed the burden of proof on the Adivasis (*ibid.*). Fifth, the new law came up with the concept of distributing alternative land, thereby shifting the entire narrative from restoration to distribution of alternative land. Those who had less than five acres alienated would be given an equal amount of alternative land. The government contended that the 1975 law did not have any provision to provide land to those Adivasi communities that were historically landless, while the new law provided up to an acre of land to such households as well. The law was disputed by the People's Union for Civil Liberties in the Supreme Court, but the court upheld it in 2009 (State of Kerala and Another v. People's Union for Civil Liberties 2009). Currently, the government has turned this law into a project

which subsumes the provision of land to Adivasis in other laws (such as the Forest Rights Act). This aspect is explored in the next section.

At this point, it is worthwhile to consider the complexities involved in the restoration of alienated lands in the case of the Paniyas. Although some Paniya households had experienced alienation, restoration did not become a major issue of political contestation since most of these households had been landless (in terms of private property) for centuries. The Paniyas, through their oral narratives, do hold the view that they had had relatively free access to the lands of Wayanad before the arrival of the settlers and the colonisers. This was discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Such a larger perspective of free access rights to land was far away from the narratives of the projectised efforts. The Paniyas, through their land struggles, refer to the autonomy that they had enjoyed in the distant past with respect to access to land and the belonging they feel with the land in Wayanad. This was inextricably bound with their traditional occupation of farm labour. The Paniyas' idea of territory in this sense is a fraught one that clashes with the idea contained in the limited landfare measures pursued by the state. At the same time, the land struggles have more or less accepted the option of alternative land in locations determined by the state, considering it to be the only pragmatic option available.

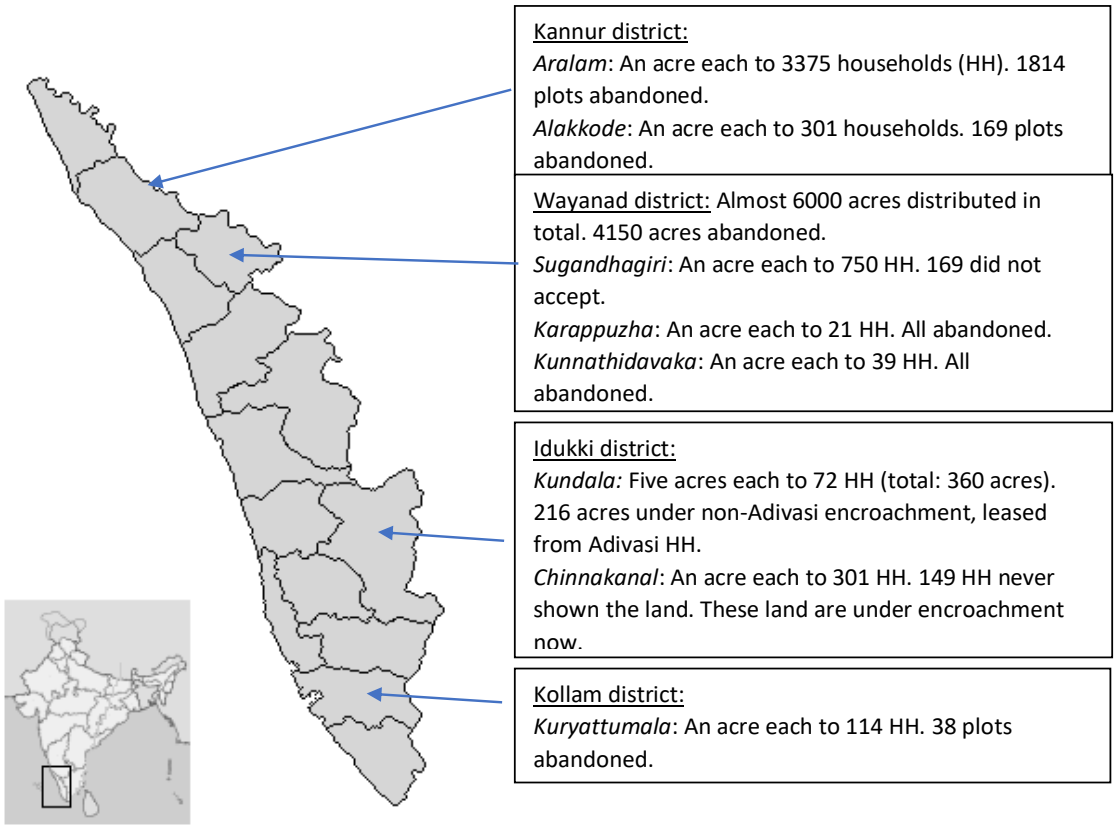
Land Distribution Projects After Kudilketti Samaram

It was against the backdrop of these failed projects and diluted laws that the *Kudilketti Samaram* took place in 2001. Probably because the leaders were led by the experience of the Paniyas, they did not oppose the idea of alternative land as proposed by the 1999 law when they produced their demands before the state.

Accepting the demands of the movement, the Congress-led government set up the Tribal Resettlement and Development Mission (TRDM) with the objective of resolving the issue of Adivasi landlessness in a "mission mode." The Mission came into operation on 1

January 2002 and was given the deadline of 31 December that year to end Adivasi landlessness once and for all. New functionaries were appointed to this project, with offices in key Adivasi areas. Land distribution began with much enthusiasm in Kundala, Marayur, Chinnakkanal, and Pooppara in Idukki district, southern Kerala. It was also decided that the farms in Sugandhagiri and Pookode that were running on losses would be terminated and the land distributed to their Adivasi residents. However, the enthusiasm died down soon, triggering another land struggle in Muthanga, Wayanad, in 2003.

The lands distributed under the TRDM failed to change the lives of those resettled and most land remains abandoned or encroached upon. Figure 6.3 presents the numbers of households that abandoned land in various TRDM sites. Most of the people who abandoned the land are now back in their old colonies. The largest of these project sites was the Aralam farm, which was bought by the state government from the central government using funds meant for the Adivasis, with the purpose of providing land to landless Adivasis. The script of the "farm experiment" was repeated here, but with a major tweak: of the 7,000 acres, 2,500 acres were converted into a commercial farm in the form of a public limited company under the ownership of the Kerala government (and not a cooperative society that would have included residents in the governance and shared profits with them). The rest were distributed to Adivasis households, an acre each. Any commitment to provide sustained income to the resettled households was thus erased. Half of the distributed plots have been abandoned (I delve into the details in the next chapter).



Note: Data from Paravath (2015). Only a few of the 23 sites where land was distributed are shown here. Map of Kerala by Sangfroid~commonswiki (Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain).

Figure 6.3: Land abandonments in sites of distribution

Kerala was already experimenting with these landfare measures when the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, commonly known as the Forest Rights Act or FRA, came into effect at the national level in 2006, after prolonged agitations by various Adivasi organisations that had come together under the banner Campaign for Survival and Dignity. The FRA neither redistributes new land nor grants titles over the land. The law merely recognises existing habitation in forest land and grants a "Record of Rights" that documents such recognition. The Record of Right is hereditary but not transferable. Households are given "individual rights" over the residence area, while the community as a whole is granted "community rights" over the collection of non-timber forest products. Today the FRA has become a major means of giving land to landless Adivasi households in Kerala as

the state has practically subsumed this process under the project of land distribution envisaged in the 1999 Act. Under the FRA, Adivasi households submit an application for a Record of Rights to the Forest Rights Committee at the community level, from where the accepted applications are passed on to a Sub-District Level Committee. The applications that pass this level are finally sent to the District Level Committee, headed by the district collector, for approval. My reading of the Legislative Assembly archives showed that the accepted number of applications were subtracted from the government-enumerated figure of landless households (around 10,000) to show that landlessness was consistently coming down. Further, the latest data on the implementation of the FRA shows that the average size of land approved for distribution under individual rights is 1.3 acres. This is far less than the 9.9 acres that are allowed in the FRA, but very much in line with the one to five acres (in practice, only one acre) stipulated in the 1999 Act. This clearly demonstrates how the FRA was being used to fulfil the requirements of the 1999 Act. Further, landless Adivasi households living in colonies outside the forests, whose number is likely to be very large, will not be eligible for land when the government ticks the box of FRA implementation. This is because the FRA stipulates that the applicant household must have been in continuous residence in the forestland before the cut-off date of December 2005. In addition, the provision of community rights has been completely disregarded by the state governments: of the 1,395 community rights claims submitted at the Forest Rights Committee level up until December 2012, only four were approved (MoTA 2012). No new claims have been submitted thereafter until July 2019, the last month for which data is available (MoTA 2019). The FRA process is marred by a number of factors. There is a lack of awareness about the law, the domination of bureaucrats in the claim verification process, a severe lack of funds in the hands of the Forest Rights Committees to organise the claim-making process, and the absence of strong institutions (Rajshekhar 2019). The end result

is the parcelling out of Records of Rights (not titles) on pieces of land in a projectised manner to reduce the official landlessness figures to zero.

Other projects that came thereafter demonstrate this trend further. In 2013, the Congress-led government in power initiated the "Zero Landless Citizens Kerala 2015 Project," subtitled "A Mission Mode Project." The project aimed at eradicating landlessness in the entire province (not just among Adivasis) by 2015 (the government was in power from 2011 to 2016). The project website observed that "landlessness has been a key issue especially in a land-dearth province like Kerala," and set out the ambition of making Kerala the first province to become "zero landless" by 2015 (Department of Revenue 2010). The mission stated its objective as providing secure titles that will "help the poor and the underprivileged better access to legal and financial services to raise capital and to invest in avenues of productive and sustainable nature" (*ibid.*). To realise this grand vision, each applicant household was to be given a paltry three cents (121 sq. m.) of land. The project identified a total of 243,928 landless people in Kerala based on the applications received (Malayala Manorama 2013). Kannur district was declared as the first "landless citizens district" within a month of initiating the project (NDTV 2013). However, towards the end of the project period, only 10 percent of the applicants were found to be given titles; many of these households never received the actual land (Al Jazeera 2015). For the vast majority of Adivasis, the meagre three cents were not attractive at all. The Mission was thus simply meant to declare Kerala "zero landless," leaving the Adivasi land question untouched.

The same government initiated another land distribution project for the Adivasis titled *Aashikkum Bhoomi Adivasikku Swantham* ("land desired by the Adivasis will be theirs") in 2013. This project provided for a sum of Rs.1 million (roughly £10,000) to purchase a minimum of 25 cents and a maximum of an acre from willing landowners. The land would be subsequently assigned to landless Adivasi households. The burden of finding a willing seller

was placed on the Adivasis. Seven hundred and seventy seven households were given an average of 38 cents under this project (KLA 2018e). The project soon ran into controversies of mismanagement. The Public Accounts Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly found discrepancies in the utilisation of funds by the project. Only 39 percent of the allotted Rs.1.75 billion (roughly £17.5 million) were spent. Only half of the 10,517 applicants actually received any land. Although additional funds were allotted for the construction of houses, contractors had not built any in Wayanad. Most houses did not get electricity (Janayugam 2018). The Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in power at the time of fieldwork terminated this project and shifted the burden of finding land to the district collector, who would create a "land bank" of identified plots and allot them to landless households through a lottery system. No land has been distributed under this scheme so far since the government came to power in 2016 as per data available from 2018 (STDD 2018). The procedures involve tedious coordination between and approval from several levels of bureaucrats from multiple departments, chiefly the Revenue Department, the Forest Department, the Scheduled Tribes Development Department, the *panchayaths*, and the district collectorates.

The LDF government brought out another mission-mode project for the entire province called the Livelihood Inclusion and Financial Empowerment Programme (LIFE Mission), aimed at providing housing to all landless and/or homeless in the province. The programme website stated its mission in these terms: "In five years, provide safe and decent houses to all landless-homeless in Kerala to help them seek a livelihood by themselves, participate in social activities decently and access welfare programmes including financial services" (LIFE Mission 2016).

The project had an array of categories that were eligible for a home such as those homeless households that owned land, those homeless who did not have land, those who had unfinished or unliveable houses, and those who were living in temporary housing in

wastelands, coasts, or plantations. The large number of landless Adivasis, including the Paniyas, living in colonies became eligible under the provisions. LIFE was presented as a flagship programme in the LDF manifesto in the 2016 provincial elections. Of the 8,060 households identified in the first phase of the project in Wayanad, 6,430 were Adivasi (Kerala Kaumudi 2019). The "mission mode" ensured that the programme was being run with more accelerated financial and bureaucratic energy compared to what would be available to business-as-usual programme implementation. This could be clearly seen in the range of bureaucrats involved. The programme was being run through the three-tier local governance system. At the lowest level, the implementation committee comprised of all elected members of the *grama panchayath*, the state-run Kudumbashree poverty alleviation programme, the supervisor of Integrated Child Development Scheme (that ran creches), and the local agricultural officer. At the district level, the committee had the *district panchayath* president, the collector, Members of Legislative Assembly, and representatives of the *block panchayaths* and *grama panchayaths*. At the provincial level, the committee consisted of the chief minister, the opposition leader, the chief secretary of the government, eight key ministers (finance, housing, social justice, electricity, water, labour, fisheries, and Scheduled Caste-Scheduled Tribes development), and vice-chairman of the Kerala State Planning Board. Besides these, 15 full-time bureaucrats (including a Chief Executive Officer from the civil services and one full-time bureaucrat in each of the 14 districts) were employed. The allure of the LIFE Mission was so much that during fieldwork, I found tribal promoters as well as myself telling Paniya households about the programme when I saw the dilapidated houses in the colonies that I went to. When I visited Aralam Farm, I found the tribal promoters in a last-minute hurry to get the number of applications under the LIFE Mission right. A promoter confided in me: "They are simply rebuilding existing houses. These houses were abandoned. We have to wade through the tall grasses to find some of them!" The inhabitants of these plots/houses had abandoned the

site unable to make a stable living possible. Houses were thus being rebuilt for no Adivasi household to live in them.

In the case of the Adivasis, the LIFE Mission does the work of erasing their demands for land by giving houses, many of which were provided in apartment complexes. Critics of the mission pointed out that the flats built under LIFE effectively functioned as a new form of *jaathicolonies*: from horizontal to vertical ones (Dhanya 2019). Beneficiaries in effect became tenants who could own the flat only after paying the stipulated rent amount for 15-20 years. The asset could not be sold or rented out during that period. Most flats built for Adivasis in Wayanad district and Nilambur (Malappuram district) were found to be congested. One of the recipients of a LIFE flat said: "The government cheated the Adivasis. After receiving a flat, we heard that there was an earlier plan to distribute 700 acres of land to Adivasis in Nilambur. We should have gone for land, but no one told us about it" (*ibid*.).

Projectisation of ending landlessness, thus, ends up reproducing landlessness. Far from being substantive redistribution, these projects do not help the households in getting out of poverty. Looking at these projects over the years, it can be clearly seen how land struggles are a product of the particular way in which Adivasis are being included in landfare. This logic has been in operation in governance regardless of the political party/coalition in power, making it possible to generalise it as the logic of operation of the state with respect to the Adivasi land question.

Withholding Available Land

This section looks at a third way in which Adivasi landlessness is allowed to continue: through the non-distribution of land that is available for distribution. Three instances of this scenario are elaborated: non-distribution of forests classified as "vested" in the state, non-distribution

of plantation lands currently held by corporates on expired leases, and non-implementation of an expert committee's recommendations on the protection of the Western Ghats.

On 21 April 2019, close to 200 landless Adivasis, mostly Paniyas, entered 260 acres of plantations in Thovarimala in Wayanad and organised a land struggle. The participants of the struggle demanded that the state redistribute the land to the participants. It was two days before the general election in the country, so the news failed to receive much attention in the media. Among the participants of the struggle were Chippan, a Paniya labourer, and his family (figure 6.4). The participants were chased away by the police, under instructions from the CPI(M)-led government. Many, including Chippan, were detained. Participants alleged that they were driven out because the government wanted to allow the plantation corporate Harrisons Malayalam Limited to continue holding the land, though it was taken over from the company by the state way back in the 1970s. The next day, the participants reorganised in front of the collectorate, the seat of the district administration, and began a sit-in protest.



Figure 6.4: Chippan and family members at Thovarimala. Image by Shafeeq Thamarassery, DoolNews. Reproduced with permission.

This was not the first time Chippan's family had participated in a land struggle. Many decades ago his father had eight acres of land that were alienated to settlers (DoolNews 2019a). In 1995, Chippan had participated in the Cheengeri land struggle, where landless Adivasis occupied a state-owned plantation. The struggle was crushed by the police, then under a government led by the Indian National Congress. Chippan was kept in prison for 11 days then. In 2003, he participated in the struggle at Muthanga, also in Wayanad, where hundreds of Adivasis entered forests and occupied the land. Chippan was beaten up during the violence unleashed by the police, then under another Congress government. 2019 was thus a repetition of this chain of events.

Chippan's participation in the Thovarimala struggle will make better sense if we consider the legal status of the plantation land. Activists point out that the 260 acres were taken over by the state as ceiling-surplus land from Harrisons Malayalam Limited back in the days when the land reforms were being implemented (DoolNews 2019b). The land was kept under the custodianship of the Forest Department. This department brought the land under the category of "vested forests" (explained below) in 1971. The participants of the struggle alleged that the land was still occupied and managed by the company and that the government was facilitating this occupation. The Thovarimala struggle was crushed on behalf of the company, the protesters argued. Although the actual status of the land could be ascertained only when the government put out the title documents of the land in the public domain, there was something to be said about the uncertainty surrounding it – this uncertainty had a history that was as complex as the history of the political economy of land in Kerala. To untangle this history, I identify two strands of events that can be peeled back to understand how the Thovarimala struggle took place.

In 1971, the Kerala Private Forest (Vesting and Assignment) Act came into effect. This law "vested" in the state the ownership of isolated forest patches that were either under private

ownership or present in wastelands. These forests were declared reserved forests and brought under the administration of the Forest Department. The law further specified that these lands could be distributed to "agriculturalists, agricultural labourers, and members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes." In 2001, following the *Kudilketti Samaram*, the provincial government sought permission from the central government to distribute 19,000 acres of these forests to Adivasis as part of the agreement reached between the government and the activists. Despite the provision for distribution of land in the Act itself and despite receiving permission for distributing forestland, only 3,500 acres have been distributed so far. Of these, 2,200 acres belonged to the two "farm experiments" of the Sugandhagiri and Pookode projects that failed; where the government was forced to distribute the lands after the *Kudilketti Samaram* (they were meant for distribution anyway). This meant that only 1,300 acres were actually non-farm vested forests, which were transferred to the Revenue Department from the Forest Department for the purpose of distribution. 15,500 acres of land (more than what is required to provide an acre each to the official figure of 10,000 landless households) remain undistributed. Thus, legally speaking, Thovarimala is already available for distribution as per the 1971 Act.

The presence of Harrisons Malayalam Limited complicated the story. Plantations, mostly of tea, were set up in Kerala during the colonial times by private British companies on lands leased from the kingdoms of Travancore and Kochi and the British administration in Malabar. When the country became independent, these companies ceased to have the legal right to exist in India under the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act 1947. Many of these companies transferred the control of the plantations to private Indian companies. However, the lease periods of these plantations have currently expired and, therefore, the lands belong to the state by law. The exemption of the plantations from the purview of land reforms of the 1970s meant that the ceiling limits were not applicable and no land was ever taken over by the state. As many as nine different commissions set up by various governments over the years had

indicated that the lands must be taken over. The latest of these was the Rajamanickam Commission constituted in 2013.[39] The leaked report submitted by the commission estimated that the land that could be taken over was equivalent to almost one-seventh of the land currently in possession of the Revenue Department of the Kerala government, totalling around 500,000 acres (for perspective, the total number of all Adivasi households in the province is only around 140,000) (Rajamanickam 2016). One of the major encroachers was Harrisons Malayalam Limited, which squatted on 73,000 acres of land – 28,600 acres in the Wayanad district alone (KLA 2017). The company is currently owned by the R.P. Goenka Group, headquartered in Mumbai. Provincial governments over the years, however, have been repeatedly sabotaging the process of taking over these lands, mostly by manipulating the legal process, i.e. not submitting affidavits in time, sending weak lawyers who do not argue the cases well in the courts, and not presenting all the evidence that is available. Rather than implement the Rajamanickam Commission's recommendations, the LDF government in power at the time of fieldwork removed Mr Rajamanickam, the head of the commission, from the post of "special officer and collector" in charge of taking over these lands.

The non-distribution of the vested forests and the undermining of the process of taking over plantation lands amount to "withholding" available land. On many occasions, the governments have cited "land scarcity" in the province as a reason for the slow progress in the distribution of land (KLA 2019). However, the availability of 15,500 acres of vested forests and 500,000 acres of plantation land exposes the weak foundations of the scarcity narrative.

Another instance of withholding land, though more indirectly, was the rejection of the Gadgil Report, an expert committee report on the protection of the Western Ghats. The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, headed by the ecologist Dr Madhav Gadgil, submitted its report

[39] The real name of the officer is used here as it is in the public domain.

to the Government of India in 2011. A key recommendation was the meaningful implementation of the Forest Rights Act and the recognition of Adivasis as equal participants in protecting forests. The report identified the entire Western Ghats, from Maharashtra to Kerala, as ecologically sensitive and called for stringent restrictions on all intervention, including mining, agriculture, construction, and infrastructure development. The panel classified the Western Ghats into a gradation of "ecologically sensitive zones" (WGEEP 2011). The report explicitly called for an extensive programme of granting community rights to the Adivasis under the FRA. The report detailed the flaws in the extant implementation of the FRA using a detailed case study of the Kadar Adivasi community of central Kerala. The recommendations, however, faced severe opposition from a range of stakeholders – miners, settlers, churches representing the settlers as well as political parties (both the CPI(M) and the Congress) (Nair and Moolakkattu 2017). The governments that came to power one after another rejected this report, arguing that implementing the report would make land scarce and stall development. The rejection of this report meant that an opportunity for the FRA to find meaningful implementation, including the granting of community forest rights, was lost.

The examples of non-distribution of vested forests and plantation lands as well as the indirect non-distribution of forest rights as per the Gadgil Report reveal how withholding available land can become a subtle means of allowing Adivasi landlessness to continue.

Welfare v. Landfare

The diversity of ways in which the state in Kerala has responded to the land claims of the Adivasis shows the utility of the term landfare; from various forms of piecemeal distribution to modes of non-distribution, a combination of strategies has been used by the state. This land provision regime of the state in Kerala cannot be captured using any one term like redistribution, distribution, or non-distribution. Landfare, in addition, has been mixed with the large array of welfare programmes described in Chapter 2 to address the marginalisation of the

Adivasis. Sometimes they are indistinguishable, as in the case of LIFE that provides housing to the landless.

It can be seen that Kerala's landfare performs poorly in granting social and political control over land, although the land struggles seek such control. To start with the farm experiments, these projects appeared to promise control over land by making the land recipients partners in running the projects. However, far from granting such control, we saw how the recipients were reduced to the status of tenants on their own land. Abandonment of received land at the sites of distribution further attest to Kerala's landfare falling short of the aim of granting control over land as sought by the Adivasis. In fact, far from substantive redistribution of powers, the remote, unhabitable sites where land is provided do not even help the recipients reproduce themselves with wage labour. Programmes like LIFE only do the work of reducing the cost of labour reproduction. In those land distribution sites where the Adivasis stay on, the recipients still need to find wage labour. Landfare thus performs only the function of surviving the day, the bare minimum function of welfare.

This mode of landfare that combines the minimal provision of land with welfare, does not address the underlying power relations that keep the Paniyas marginalised. Keeping in view the fact that most land distribution projects are taken up in response to land struggles that receive wide attention, it can be argued that Kerala's landfare with respect to the Adivasis is carried out with the purpose of putting out these land struggles rather than that of substantive redistribution or control over resources. At this point, I bring back the overall context of capitalist growth followed by Kerala (described in Chapter 2), the historical dispossession of the Paniyas from access to land (Chapter 3), the multidirectional livelihood expulsions faced by the Paniyas (Chapter 4), and the role of their specific position in Kerala's caste hierarchy in rendering them surplus. Placing the landfare measures in this context, it can be seen that far from decommodifying labour, the landfare measures perpetuate the commodification of labour,

either by reducing them to a status equivalent to that of tenants in received lands, or forcing them to find wage labour at sites of land distribution, or forcing them to abandon received lands and look for wage labour in the vicinity of their old colonies.

This chapter also hints at how the state sees the Adivasis, a theme that is taken up in detail in the next chapter. The projectisation of land shows that far from considering the Adivasis as active, rightful owners of land who experienced historical injustice, the state considers them simply to be passive, beneficiaries of schemes. The failure of many a land distribution project to substantially take off demonstrates that the state assumes that Adivasi recipients of land will get out of poverty with the mere distribution of land. The commitment to make these projects long-term and sustainable is far from the state's agenda.

Two fallouts of the landfare regime are described next. First, even as the state is conspicuously present in the colonies through its bureaucratic machinery and through the presence of the many tribal promoters who are given most responsibilities, including having to receive applications for land and all welfare programmes, it appears that the state is slowly keeping itself at an arm's length from the colonies, and therefore, from accountability. The promoters are more often than not appointed by the political party that holds sway in a local government unit. On a two-year contract with a meagre honorarium of Rs.9,000, the promoter has no incentive to be the crucial link between the Adivasis and the state in addressing the issue of landlessness. As Chatterjee (2008) notes, the state in India has expanded its presence in the lives of the poor to an extent never seen before. However, the promoters carrying the weight of the Kerala model on their shoulders present to us how the state has found a mechanism of maintaining the semblance of presence good enough to carry out the task of receiving applications and distributing welfare measures. This falls too short of the comprehensive and sustained engagement required to respond to the multidirectional expulsions faced by the landless households and how this triggers demands for land.

Second, the reproduction of landlessness by the state is producing larger changes in the province's politics. The most conspicuous of these has been the influx of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ("national union of volunteers") or the RSS and the Bharatiya Janata Party ("Indian people's party") or the BJP into the Adivasi colonies. These Hindu nationalist organisations are capitalising on the neglect that the issue of Adivasi landlessness has faced at the hands of the two mainstream political coalitions. Figure 6.5 shows a march organised by the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Morcha, the Dalit-Adivasi wing of the BJP, in front of the district administration, raising the issue of Adivasi landlessness. Land is thus turning out to be the Achilles heel of Kerala politics, with respect to its vulnerability to co-optation by Hindutva forces. The impact can also be seen with respect to autonomous social movements. C.K. Janu allied with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, after forming her own party in the run-up to the provincial assembly election of 2016, again citing the broken promises by the Congress and the Left in addressing Adivasi landlessness. The Janadhipathya Rashtriya Sabha ("democratic political assembly") was formed with the explicit aim of winning power to address Adivasi landlessness. This caused a split in the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha, the movement that she had founded. Janu left this alliance in 2018 and re-joined during the provincial elections of 2021. The harm, however, had been done: many of the followers who went with her into the coalition with the RSS/BJP had soon become members of the latter.



Figure 6.5: A march led by the SC-ST Morcha of the BJP in front of the Wayanad district administration, 1 January 2018. The banner reads "A march to the collectorate highlighting the thousands of Adivasi households without land and without titles and their increasing harassment." Image by the author.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to understand why Adivasi landlessness persists in a province that has sufficient financial and bureaucratic strength to resolve the issue, particularly considering how it had become an embarrassment to the pathway of social development that the province has always boasted of. Land distribution efforts were pursued at least since 1957 and continue to this day. These are in addition to the largesse showered on the Adivasis in the form of welfare programmes that range from free rice to financial assistance for health expenses. This chapter indicates that an explanation of the persistent landlessness as just being a result of the state's retreat from welfare provision under neoliberalism is limited. Neither does an explanation in terms of the reconstruction of the state as a broker for market forces in "neoliberal times" provide much clarity since withholding land for private parties (plantations) has been a feature of the political economy of land in the province since colonial times. Explanations provided in terms of the restricted, caste-blind class framework of the Communist parties (Kjosavik and

Shanmugaratnam 2015, Steur 2011) also fail to provide an adequate explanation, as a commitment to a class framework itself should have addressed to a considerable extent the landless of Adivasis, most of whom are agricultural labourers.

This chapter looked at the ways in which the state is actually approaching its implementation of land provision and filtered out three modalities that end up perpetuating Adivasi landlessness. Landlessness is reduced to a workable target figure that should be brought down to zero over the course of time. Land distribution is projectised; the projectisation takes various shapes such as "farm experiments" and "missions." Even when copious acres of land are available, they are withheld, facilitating illegal occupation by private companies. The political will to distribute land to Adivasis coexists with the political will (across the ideological spectrum) to protect land encroachment by corporate companies and to serve the interests of settler communities. This analysis took on a historical perspective, reading through land distribution efforts since the formation of the province, rather than focusing on any one particular project. The chapter also demonstrated how land struggles that erupt sporadically, yet periodically, are continual attempts to raise their critiques of the state's work contained in projectisation and the withholding of available land. Thus, projectisation does not depoliticise development; rather, it stokes further politics. Placed against the backdrop of the Kerala model, these state endeavours betray the tension between the agenda of substantive land distribution and welfare.

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7 | Assembling an Acre of Justice

I felt bewildered as I walked out of Rajan's colony. Had Rajan just asked for private property rights? Is that why he left the land he received in Aralam?

"The tax on my land should be paid by me, not the government. *Kaivasharekha* (Record of Rights) is just a paper with our photo on it," Rajan said, pointing out why he did not feel the land was his. This desire for a full title on an individual plot appeared to go against the idea of community rights as a major demand of Adivasi movements across the country.

"Land must hear what we speak," Rajan said, inviting me to sit out. The goat, Rajan's current source of income, started to stroke my arm, seeking attention. Rajan's saffron wristband made me further uneasy: he was clearly with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It turned out he was a member of the district office of its Adivasi wing.

"I will do whatever it takes to help our community. People say the Maoists should be shot. But I say I could stand with them if it is to help my people."

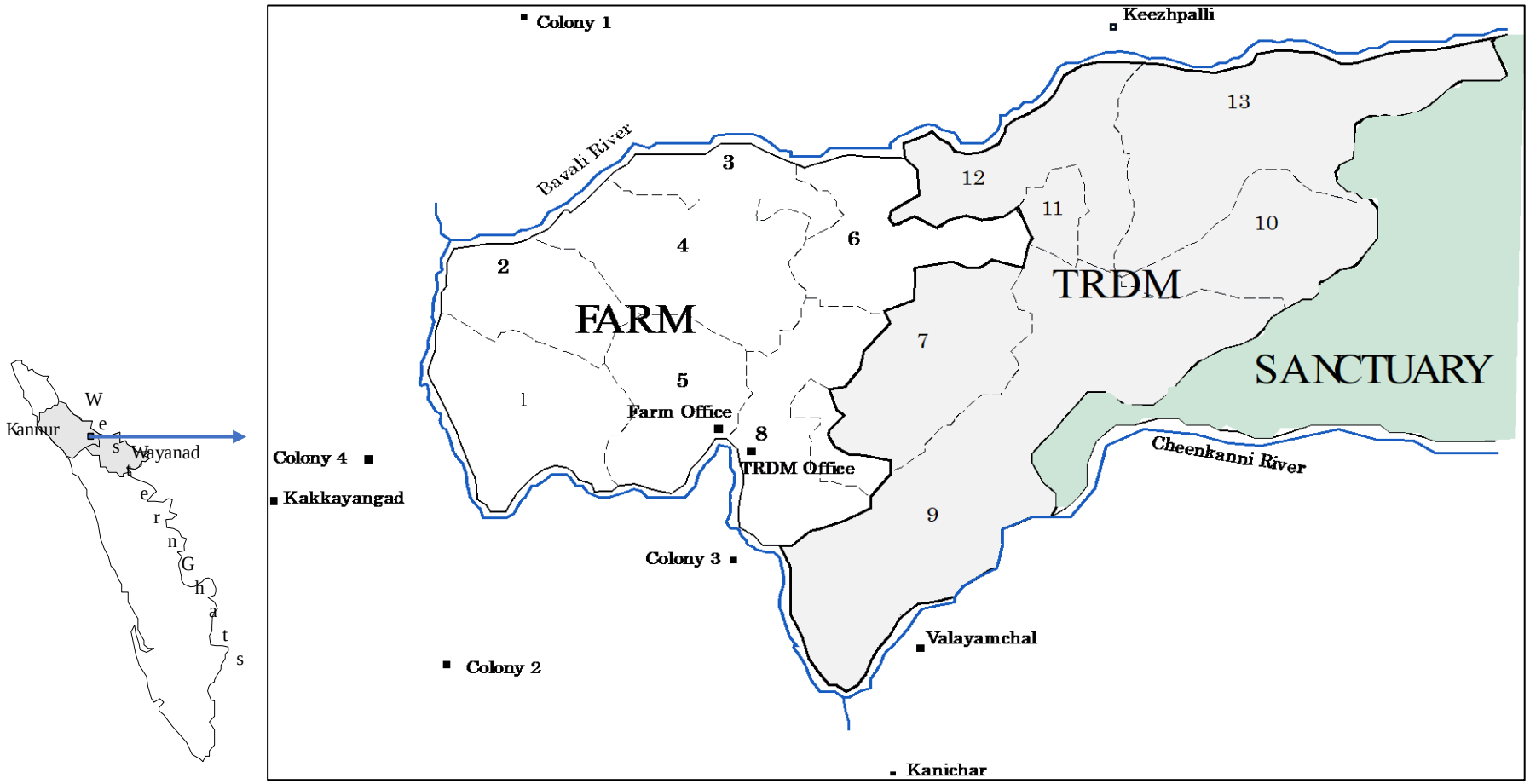
The RSS *and* the Maoists? Rajan left me bewildered again.

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The previous chapter explored how the state has gone about implementing land provision for the Adivasis over the last few decades and how these efforts subtly betray a tension between land claims and state responses. The chapter also brought out how this shift resulted in a scenario wherein the state ended up reproducing Adivasi landlessness. The effect was that the struggles of the Paniya community have gained a characteristic of perpetuity over time. This chapter follows the lives of the Paniyas *after receiving land* and explores how the struggles get perpetuated even after the reception of land. The study site is the Aralam land

distribution project in Kannur district (figure 7.1), adjacent to Wayanad. It was chosen because the majority of land recipients here were Paniyas. The project distributed around 3,000 acres (approximately 1,200 hectares) of land to landless Adivasi households – an acre each. This was following the land struggles of 2001, which ended in an agreement between Adivasi leaders and the provincial government for land distribution in 23 sites. Almost half the households have abandoned the plots given to them in Aralam and have gone back to live in the colonies that they came from. The chapter seeks to understand why the Paniyas have been unable to form a relationship with the land that they received.

Figure 7.1: Layout of Aralam



Note: The numbers 1,2, etc. inside the project area indicate blocks into which the site is divided. Colonies 1, 2, etc. represent Paniya colonies outside the site where fieldwork was conducted. TRDM stands for Tribal Resettlement and Development Mission. Map by author, based on a specimen received from the Aralam Farm office. Not to scale.

I make two arguments here: first, landfare can become a means of simply disposing of landless Adivasis. Second, land distribution efforts can fall prey to paternalistic assumptions about Adivasis' relationship with land. The empirical material presented in this chapter shows that the two processes work together comfortably. Far from providing social and political control over land to the recipients, the distribution of land in Aralam only seeks to subsidise the cost of reproduction of labour power, sometimes failing even in this respect. The assumptions about the Adivasis creep into landfare in such a way that land recipients feel they are living the life envisaged for them by the state – what I term "state life" – and not the life they had wished for themselves.

The chapter is divided into four further sections. The next section introduces the Aralam land distribution project. This particular plan of the project has implications for the perpetuation of Paniya struggles, as the data will reveal. Following this, I briefly outline the scholarly discussions on redistributive social justice and Adivasi-land relationships in order to aid my enquiry of perpetual struggles in this chapter. The chapter moves on to present field observations from Aralam.

Planning Aralam

What goes into making a living land distribution site? How do perpetual struggles continue even after receiving land? I visualise Aralam as a project in which disparate elements have been assembled to align with one another and create a physical manifestation of social justice for landless Adivasis. I identify the main elements as land, a layout, a welfare apparatus, the Adivasis themselves, and the ideas and assumptions that go behind creating the project. The last element is identified here as the purported goal of ensuring redistributive social justice and the assumptions regarding the Adivasi-land relationship. Visualising Aralam as an assemblage makes strange the apparent naturalness of its ecosystem. An assemblage is not any random collation, but is, in fact, an assortment where elements are brought together to (supposedly)

stand together. In Tania Li's words, the lens of assemblage helps us ask: "how is the assemblage stabilised or made to cohere? Why does it take this form and not another?" (Li 2014, 590). In the case of Aralam, the relevant question would be: what holds the layout sketched in figure 7.1 together? How does the layout impact the perpetuation of Adivasi land struggles? This chapter will show that exploring the assumptions and ideas behind a land distribution project can be generative in teasing out why the struggles of the Paniyas continue even after receiving land. In the next few paragraphs, I explain the various elements that went into the making of Aralam.

Elements of the Assemblage

Land

Situated on the western slopes of the Western Ghats, the site has an elevation ranging from 50m to 1,145m. The site is flanked by the Bavali and the Cheenkanni rivers on three sides. The land in Aralam was initially 12,000 acres of forest. In the post-Green-Revolution period, 7,000 acres were converted into the Aralam Farm as a horticultural project to boost agricultural growth in a plantation mode (Sreerekha 2010). The remaining 5,000 acres continue to exist as forests in form of the Aralam Wildlife Sanctuary, which extends as the Brahmagiri Wildlife Sanctuary across the border in Karnataka. The sanctuary is a tourist attraction today and boasts 23 species of mammals and 150 species of birds, many of them endangered, as well as tropical evergreen trees (DoT 2017). The Farm, meanwhile, grows cashew, coconut, pepper, and pineapple.

Scattered Paniya households had been living here without any rights over the land before the resettlement project came. In parallel with the Muthanga agitations of 2001 in Wayanad, land struggles were organised in Aralam by landless Adivasi communities under various banners such as the Adivasi Dalit Federation (the land struggle in Aralam was only for

Adivasis). As part of the agreement reached by the then Indian National Congress-led government and the Adivasi leaders, it was decided that land would be distributed in Aralam along with 22 other sites across Kerala. The Farm was bought by the provincial government from the central government in 2004 for this purpose, using funds from the Tribal Sub-Plan, the province's budget for the Adivasis. Of its 7,000 acres, close to 3,400 acres were distributed to landless Adivasi households. Of the 3,375 households that received land, 1,814 have abandoned their plots (KLA 2018d) (figure 7.2). Each distributed plot is given its identity using concrete (in the form of *jandas* or boundary stones) and paper (in the form of *kaivasharekha*, the Record of Rights).



Figure 7.2: An abandoned house in Aralam. The yellow board shows the details of the house painted onto the wall. This house was constructed with Rs.300,000. All over Kerala, Adivasi houses constructed with state funds have these yellow boxes on the front hollering out state benevolence. Image by the author.

Layout

I received a map of Aralam from the Farm administration office only on the last day of fieldwork here. Until then it was a period of complete disorientation, walking through the dry grass all over. It was December, but Aralam was scorched brown. For one of the most densely populated provinces in the country, the deserted plots and silent pathways of Aralam felt disquieting. An occasional auto-rickshaw disturbed this stillness. Besides that, there was only a heavy, sullen eeriness. Cast away from the rest of the world, Aralam was in "the middle of nowhere," as my interlocutors would tell me one after another. Aralam felt like a "heterotopia" (Foucault 1986), an "other space" that is linked to the rest of society, yet cut off from it, like a prison or an asylum. I would later confirm this observation when residents shared how they felt they were "thrown away" here.

The map revealed that there was a layout to this eeriness. As figure 7.1 above shows, the distributed land is in the area marked as TRDM, which stands for Tribal Resettlement and Development Mission, the name of the project initiated in 2001 to carry out the task of land distribution within a stipulated timeframe of one year. The TRDM site stands in between the rest of the Farm and the sanctuary, a factor that would prove crucial to understanding why the plots were abandoned. The Farm was already divided into many "blocks." Blocks 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 were converted into the TRDM site. Two-third of the land was meant for distribution to households from the Wayanad district and one-third to those from the Kannur district (Sreerekha 2010).

The TRDM office, a decrepit two-room building, was the administrative centre of the resettlement site. Although the entire site fell under the Aralam *grama panchayath*, residents first encountered the state through this office. The office was staffed with a "site manager," a clerk, an engineer, and around 12 tribal promoters. This office was the lowest in the hierarchy

of the bureaucratic machinery of the provincial government's Scheduled Tribes Development Department. The office was overseen by the Integrated Tribal Development Office housed in the district collectorate, which in turn reported to the Directorate of Scheduled Tribes Development in the provincial capital Thiruvananthapuram.

I soon discovered that there was more to this layout, beyond the administration and the land. The site was closely watched by the Thunderbolt, a branch of the provincial police that hunted for Maoist rebels. The Thunderbolt officer who followed me in plainclothes one fieldwork day was finally placated when he saw my permission letter from the Directorate in Thiruvananthapuram and a driving license with an address located in the same district. Just a few weeks ago his squad had caught Kanyakumari, a Maoist rebel. Out of hunger, she had given up on hiding and let herself be found (Mathrubhumi 2017b). She was pregnant and was caught while holding a gun against a resident household, asking for food. Aralam was not just a heterotopia; it was one under the insidiously well-laid-out networks of state surveillance.

Welfare Apparatus

"What more can be done? Now it is in Adivasis that *maattam* (change) has to come," the clerk in the TRDM office sighed in the middle of a lengthy conversation about the long menu of welfare programmes offered to land recipients in Aralam. Priya was newly recruited and could not stop talking about the kindnesses the state showered on the Adivasis. Every paper went through the clerk, giving her a unique vantage point into the project and the people.

"10-20 households have been given rubber rollers, depending on the number of rubber trees. That one is for Block 9," Priya noted, pointing at the rubber-sheeting machine in the next room. I could see that vehicle of modernisation waiting there to bring *maattam* in an Adivasi household. In fact, Aralam was about to receive a host of new infrastructure projects funded by the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD), costed at Rs.607.5

million (roughly £6.1 million) (KLA 2018b). As per Priya's list, there would be roads, concrete culverts, bridges, women's self-help groups, training programmes for farming, and:

> Also, among those who are farming, a person doing it well will be given an award. On farmer's day. Or is it May 1st (Labour Day)? Kerala Piravi ("Kerala's formation;" falls on November 1), that's when it is given! Isn't that a real encouragement by the state?

Lack of infrastructure is often pointed out as a reason for the failure of land distribution projects in Kerala (George and Pampackal 2017, Paravath 2015). The new projects pump in money to spend on infrastructure in order to address this criticism. In Aralam, under the *Gothrasarathi* ("chauffeur to tribes") project, private jeeps were hired to transport students to school and discourage dropping out. Students in the campus school were given free breakfast, in addition to the usual lunch. I had myself witnessed the distribution of the Kerala state's social development measures while walking with the promoters to the residents' houses (figure 7.3). There was also a Primary Health Centre with a free ambulance service and a recently commenced palliative care service. Pointing out the array of welfare programmes, Priya remarked:

> That is what I say, what more can be done? Everything reaches them from the top to the bottom through the promoters. There is something called the food support programme. Every two months, 15 kg of rice is given (in addition to the rice from the fair-price shops). Rice, gram, oil, sugar – everything is provided to them. For free!



Figure 7.3: Finding a way in Aralam: walking with the promoter for Block 10 to the house of a disabled Paniya resident needing medical care. Image by the author.

Priya, who belonged to a Hindu upper caste and lives outside the campus, distinctly signalled in her voice above what Li (2007) called the state agents' "will to improve" the lives of subjects. It was understandable: the clerk inked out the complex maze of bureaucratic formalities and residents' applications for welfare programmes on paper, rendering life in Aralam legible in officialese. The clerk, the paperwork she generates, as well as her will to improve added their bits to making Aralam work. The message in Priya's voice was loud and clear: residents were being provided with everything needed to make lives functional on the land in Aralam. It was the Adivasis who needed to improve. The rice, the rubber sheeting machine, and the jeep service for school kids, meanwhile, added their bits to the assemblage of Aralam by serving as symbols of the welfare state through a miniature replica of Kerala's social development experiments.

Adivasis

"*Ini avar swamanasaale munnottu varanam* (now they have to come forward of their own will). The maximum that could be done is being done," Priya said firmly. The reference is to the

Paniyas, who make up the majority of the Adivasis who received land in Aralam: 2,275 of the original 3,375 recipient households (Nitheeshkumar 2014). The second largest community here is the Karimpalas, who are from the hilly eastern parts of Kannur district. There are also a few households from the Kurichya, Mavila, Kattunaika, and Bettakuruma communities. All except four of the resettled households are below the official poverty line (KLA 2018c). The lack of will to come forward was a characterisation reserved for the Paniyas. Priya continued:

> The thing is that, in the Paniya community, they don't insist that their kids go to school. If the kid does not go, the kid simply does not go. When it is cashew season, they do not go at all…The government provides all the help it can, but *they* have to come forward.

In the clerk's eyes, the Paniyas' lack of will to improve their own living conditions was the main hindrance to making Aralam work. I put this perspective under scrutiny in the next few sections.

Ideas of Justice

Ensuring social justice has been one of the primary goals of land reforms. An important feature of land distribution efforts undertaken in Kerala under the 2001 agreement was that these were not part of any radical land reforms project, but merely landfare measures that were undertaken in response to agitations by landless Adivasis. As mentioned above, this mode of landfare is combined with a host of welfare measures to replicate Kerala's social development experiments at the level of the resettlement site. What meaning does such distribution have in terms of substantive social justice?

I find Fraser's (1997a) distinction between affirmative and transformative redistribution instructive in this regard. Fraser proposed recognition, redistribution, and, later, representation as three analytically distinct categories of social justice. The first sought to address the injustice of misrecognition in social-cultural life, the second the injustice of

maldistribution of resources, and the third the injustice of inadequate representation in the public sphere (Fraser 1997a, 2008).[40] The categories of recognition and redistribution could be found in two forms: one that merely affirms justice has been done without challenging the underlying hierarchies of power (affirmative) and the other that ensures justice by transforming power equations (transformative). Seen from this perspective, provision of land in Aralam does address an injustice of maldistribution of resources, but falls short of being transformative and merely affirms the granting of social justice.

In the case of Aralam, the fact that land distribution is being done to ensure social justice to Adivasis attains special significance as this involves working with assumptions regarding the Adivasi-land relationship. The category of the "tribe" emerged during colonial times, a process that involved filtering out certain communities on the basis of questionable criteria such as primitivity, isolated living, and proximity to forests (Devalle 1992, Radhakrishna 2016, Xaxa 2016). Banerjee (2006) notes that the invented tribes served as a reference point of contrast for the modernity that the colonisers wished to usher in. Savyasachi (2016) points out that marking out the tribes was a way of carrying out primitive accumulation by the British: these communities had to be moved out or confined to a demarcated territory to facilitate the enclosure of forests for large-scale timber extraction, then a chief source of revenue. We saw in Chapter 3 how this was a slow process in the case of the Paniyas, spanning many centuries. These insights show how the tribes were being constructed as communities close to land (see also Chaudhuri 2008, Guha 2016, Karlsson 2016). Along with these went resistance movements undertaken by the communities themselves against the appropriation of land and resources. The identity of first inhabitants or Adivasis was born in southern Bihar (now

[40] Fraser's categories sparked heated debates that fundamentally questioned whether the three categories were separable (Butler 1998, Fraser and Honneth 2003, Young 1997). I go by Fraser's core response that the separation is *analytical*, although in the real world, the three kinds of justice, and the injustices that go behind them, are found all mixed up (Fraser 1997b, 1998, Fraser and Honneth 2003).

Jharkhand) in these resistance movements and spread across the country. These events indicate the socio-cultural evolution of the idea of a concrete Adivasi-land bond.[41] The term Adivasi has been in vogue in Kerala as a replacement for the term tribe; the land struggles of the 1990s and 2000s cemented this term's function as a political identity.

Li (2010) enquires into how colonial concerns about protecting communities marked out as tribes paved the way for paternalistic laws governing their lands in Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Taking examples of the creation of the idea of legally recognised communal lands and restrictions/prohibitions on the sale of land by tribes, Li shows that these laws assume that tribes are primitive and incapable of protecting themselves from the allegedly insidious institution of the market. Li further notes that these "communal fixes" result in the reification of the idea that tribes are attached to land, while evidence shows they have moved beyond the notion of communal lands or sold off lands despite restrictions. Adding to Li's exposition, Baviskar (2010) takes the example of the Forest Rights Act in India and shows that there have been fewer applications filed for community rights over land under the Act, compared to the number of applications for individual rights. In her seminal work, Baviskar (1995) had earlier questioned the problematic assumption of Adivasis as "noble savages" who would perish if taken out of their ancestral lands, in the context of displacements caused by a state-sponsored dam.

My main takeaway from the expositions by Li and Baviskar is how problematic assumptions about Adivasis' relationship with land can creep into land distribution projects. However, I use Li's take on restrictions on land sale as paternalistic with caution – it does not take into account the actual instances of land alienation and/or gradual closure to access that

[41]As Sundar (2016) points out, in north-eastern India, the term Scheduled Tribes is preferred over the term Adivasis. The local Scheduled Tribes here use the term Adivasis to refer to migrant Adivasi communities from central India who came for plantation work. Such appellation helps assert who the original inhabitants of the local lands are.

had occurred. Li's observes that it is paternalistic of the Indian courts to order land, and not cash, as compensation for eviction of Adivasis from forests; I find this argument extreme. Land, as was seen in the previous chapters, is still seen as the most adequate form of compensation by the landless Paniyas for the historical injustices meted out to them. Further below, my interlocutors also point out that just any land is not enough.

Living the State Life

This section presents empirical observations from Aralam to illustrate why the Paniyas have been struggling to form a bond with the land given to them. I highlight two processes simultaneously underway here: the disposal of landless Paniyas and land provision based on the assumption that the Paniya-land relationship is pre-given. These processes demonstrate how the Adivasis are living a life envisaged by the state for them. Four aspects shaping state life in Aralam are presented here: livelihood struggles, human-wildlife conflict, the meaning of land titles, and differing social statuses of communities that arrived on the site. All four were intricately intermeshed in the narratives of my interlocutors and are therefore not compartmentalised. Figure 7.4 shows the interlocutors' locations, which are central to my analysis.

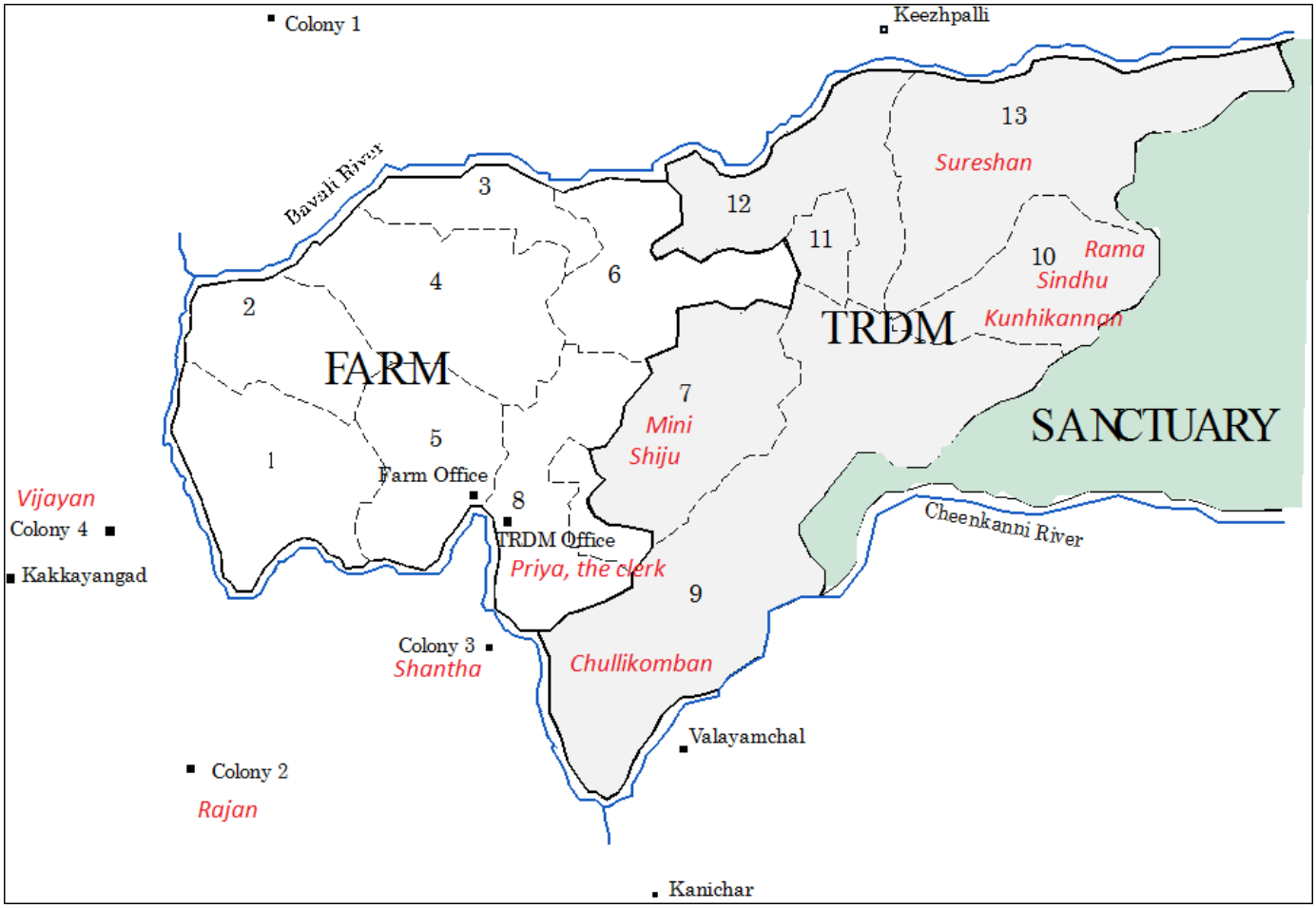


Figure 7.4: Locations of Interlocutors. The interlocutors' names are indicated in red. The numbered divisions indicated the blocks. Colony 1,2,3, and 4 indicate the colonies where I met interlocutors who had abandoned their plots in Aralam. Map by the author. Not to scale.

Livelihood Struggles

I was amazed to see how endless one acre could look. Sureshan, who lived in Block 13, was clearly working hard to make farming successful on his land. He had received the plot in the very first round of land distribution. He had left his plot once, unable to farm, but was brought back by the TRDM officials. Every part of the plot was being cultivated – with pepper, cashew, and cassava – but they hardly provided the income required to run his five-member family, indicating a simple reproduction squeeze. The rubber that he just planted would take another six to seven years before the latex could be tapped. He feared his children might not take up

rubber work then. Cashew was planted two years ago but had not fruited yet. To make ends meet, he looked for work in the construction sector outside the farm, if and when available.

Work inside the project area was scarce. The Aralam Farm was expected to provide employment to all those who had received land, especially given the entire site was bought using funds meant for Scheduled Tribe development. However, the by-laws of the company quietly avoided any reference to employing the resettled Adivasis when it was constituted (Sreerekha 2010). As the rules stood, residents were asked to work informally for around 250 days without a break, following which they were promised a long-term contract. Sureshan could not meet the requirement. Priya, the clerk, thought that the problem was with the Paniyas:

> They are irregular at work. They do not come for 250 consecutive days. This gets them disqualified. Food is being given using tribal funds for those who are working on the Farm. Why don't they come, then? Forget 250, they don't even complete 100 days. There are many who desperately need work and then there are some who do not go for the work that they get. Adivasis will always be like this. They will take a lot of time *vikasikkaan* ("to become developed"). That is what I feel. How else will change come?

Newspaper coverage of the strikes, however, tells a different story. The company has been running on losses. A Right to Information (RTI) request I filed shows that there are 105 Paniya workers on the Farm. They work in bedding, grafting, and sundry works that came up. Workers face constant non-payment of wages. The events that ensue follow a regular pattern. Workers go on strike. The company then seeks assistance from the provincial government. The government initially refuses to release funds saying the company is supposed to manage its own financials. Strikes intensify. The government then releases funds partially. A few months later, the pattern repeats itself.

At least two rounds of this whole affair occurred during the fieldwork period. In the first strike, two months of salary and wages were pending for 21 permanent officials, 5

contractual officials, 295 permanent labourers, and 119 temporary labourers (Mathrubhumi 2017a). Almost all of these labourers were Adivasi recipients of land. They could not afford to wait till the release of funds and went in search of alternative work, missing the threshold of 250 days. The pattern repeated around the same time next year when again two months' salaries and wages were in arrears. While many lived on the food provided at the workplace, the others gave up (Mathrubhumi 2018a). A third round of the pattern was underway at the time of writing this chapter (Suprabhatham 2019). Getting out of Aralam and finding work outside was not easy because of its isolation; getting out involved significant expenditure in transportation. Aralam, by design, left no alternative work for resettled Adivasis. Selling labour on the Farm was the nearest available option, which, in turn, did not pay (see also figure 7.5).



Figure 7.5: A Paniya resident of Aralam. There is no work on the Farm. The turmeric planted came out all rotten. Image by the author.

The scarcity of work was repeatedly heard in my interlocutors' narratives, with their frustration bursting out sometimes. A Paniya resident from Block 9 took out his anger by laying the blame on migrant labourers from the east of India:

> Recently we were asked to pick cashew for Rs.10 per kg. How many kilograms would we have to pick to get a day's *coolie* (wage)?! The Bengalis now do all the work here. Their *coolie* is less. When we get Rs.600, they get Rs.300. They are not given any food. The Bengalis should be driven out of here.

"Bengalis" referred to migrant labourers. Migrant labourers from the east were hardly a presence in Aralam, compared to Wayanad. Read through the perspective of Abu-Lughod (2000), wherein she emphasises the emotions and confusions in the respondents' words, the Paniya man's lines show how deep the anguish regarding the scarcity of work was.

Mini lived in Block 7, which was entirely allocated to landless Adivasi households from Wayanad. She had given up on expecting work on the Farm and was determined to work the one acre she had received. Mini was busy in NREGA work when I trekked up to her house from the nearest tarred road. NREGA work had restarted after a break. Like in Wayanad, work and payments were erratic. She had not yet picked up the skills required to grow rubber, so she tried out pepper. However, not even a month's expenditure could be met from the income drawn from the vines. To understand how she saw land, I asked her if she preferred cultivating on the land given to her or working for wages on the Farm. "It is better to cultivate one's own land. We have managed to work it somehow and produce something. Now we can talk to people confidently. When you grow on your own land, you can talk with confidence," she explained.

This also meant, however, that Mini had to stay awake every night to protect her pepper from the deer, the wild boars and the occasional elephant. Her husband stayed away in Iritty, the nearest town, where he worked in a company that packaged coconut water. Mini's plot was 90 cents. There were no other houses nearby. The other ten cents is located in another corner of Block 7 – a peculiar design for this block. Land was allotted in Block 7 in two sets: ten-cent plots all in one corner for building houses, and ninety-cent plots in various other pockets for farming. Mini resoundingly disapproved of the design:

> "It is still like the colonies of Wayanad! They had measured everything out before calling us here. We came to know about the ten cent – ninety cent arrangement only after coming here. When the houses are close to each other, there are quarrels, there is alcohol flowing. Kids do not study. I chose to build my house in the ninety-cent plot. If we plant something here and go there (to the ten-cent plot) to sleep, nothing will be left here."
>
> "*Miniyechi*, have you ever felt like leaving this place and going away?" I asked.
>
> "Never, we are here to work hard and stay on. What will my kids say if I abandon this land?"

Mini's voice revealed simultaneous frustration with the land given and the perseverance to work with the same land. The scarcity of work, the conflict with wildlife, and the low price for her pepper were testing the limits of her loyalty to the land received, but she was doing her best to hold on. Mini's account, however, exposed the ways in which the design of land distribution can hinder the formation of a meaningful relationship with the land received. In this specific instance, the ten cent–ninety cent arrangement made Mini feel that her life had not changed. Curiously, this arrangement for the Wayanad Adivasis also betrayed the paternalistic assumption that went behind the layout: that the Paniya of Wayanad were used to living in colonies and thus should be kept in a similar arrangement in Aralam.

Conflict with Wildlife

As our conversation proceeded, Mini expressed her frustration little by little. "The government will say that they have given land. What is the point of giving just land? Can you eat land?! You have to eat food only, right? What is the point of having just land?" Mini's voice became louder when she repeated the last line. I asked her if she could explain what she said. "What they did was wrong. They should have given the current Farm area to the people and converted blocks 10, 13, and 7 to the Farm," she pointed out. As visible in figure 7.1, blocks 10, 13, and the upper part of block 9 border the wildlife sanctuary and were thus most frequented by

animals. Block 7 also fell in the paths used by wildlife before the TRDM project came. The plots adjacent to the border were simply rocks. A larger planning issue is revealed here: the land distribution site was stacked between the Farm and the sanctuary. This made the land distribution site a buffer zone between the sanctuary and the Farm, protecting the crops that the Farm invested in from the animals. This was most emphatically put forth by Sindhu, who worked as a tribal promoter in Block 10: “It feels like we were dumped here to look after the animals!” Sindhu had recently lost her costly coconut saplings to tuskers from the sanctuary.

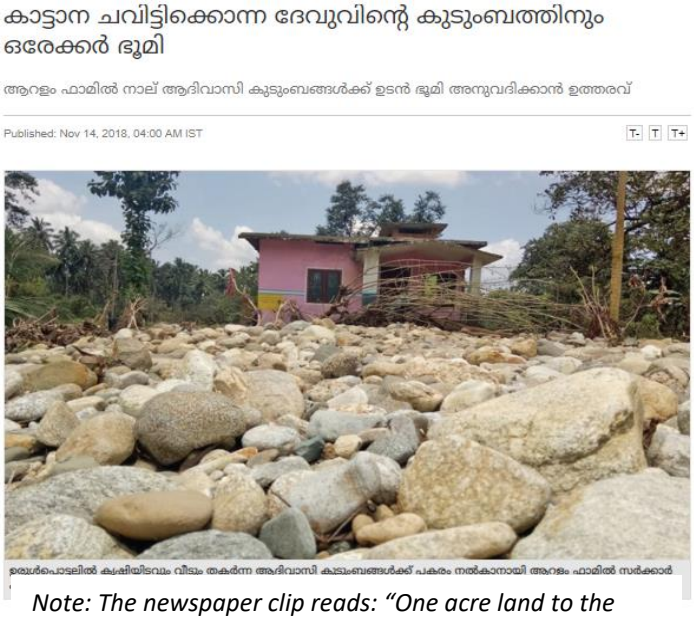
The fear behind these words became clearer to me as the days went by. I soon met Chullikomban, the tusker with little ivories, caught by the Forest Department after 19 hours of chase, involving 115 forest officers (Manorama 2017). The 25-year old had trampled four people to death in the resettlement area in the last three years (figure 7.6). Chullikomban was confident he could wreak havoc in the resettlement site and get to the fresh crops on the Farm. Several of his predecessors had done it in the past, each time making local newspaper headlines. Each time there would be a dramatic scene of residents sitting on a strike next to human corpses, followed by a reconciliation visit by a government officer. The conflict with the tuskers did not end with Chullikomban’s capture. Chappili Krishnan and Devu Karyathan, Paniya residents from Blocks 10 and 13 respectively, were trampled to death in the months that followed (Madhyamam 2018, Mathrubhumi 2018b). Devu had not officially received land then and was squatting on the plot. Following her death, land was allotted to her family as compensation. As figure 7.7 shows, the land was full of rocks and thus uncultivable.

Figure 7.6: Chullikomban



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Figure 7.7: Land as Compensation for Death



കാട്ടാന ചവിട്ടിക്കൊന്ന ദേവുവിന്റെ കുടുംബത്തിനും ഒരേക്കർ ഭൂമി

ആറളം ഫാമിൽ നാല് ആദിവാസി കുടുംബങ്ങൾക്ക് ഉടൻ ഭൂമി അനുവദിക്കാൻ ഉത്തരവ്

Published: Nov 14, 2018, 04:00 AM IST

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ഉരുൾപൊട്ടലിൽ കൃഷിയിടവും വീടും തകർന്ന ആദിവാസി കുടുംബങ്ങൾക്ക് പകരം നൽകാനായി ആറളം ഫാമിൽ സർക്കാർ

Note: The newspaper clip reads: "One acre land to the family of Devi, who was trampled to death by wild elephant". The land being provided is rocky, as seen in the picture. ©Mathrubhumi Daily

The issue of conflict with the elephants was often reduced to a need for stronger fencing. But as Vijayan, a Paniya man who had received land in Block 13 but now lived in his old colony, recounted:

> A fence was once built to stop the elephants. The fence was electrified. But the elephants pulled over a tree over it and crossed over. They are cleverer than us…I have land for the sake of having it. What is the point?

Recent scholarship on multi-species ethnography has shed light on human-animal coexistence in frontier zones (Barua 2014, Livingston and Puar 2011, Locke and Buckingham 2016). As Münster (2014) shows in the case of Wayanad, elephants remember their old paths and find new mechanisms of breaking through fences – brick or electric – and therefore the issue is irreducible to the infrastructure issue of fencing. The focus should be on coexistence, rather than conflict, the study points out. The relevance of this vignette can be gauged well if we note that tribes/indigenous peoples live in frontier zones all over the world (of course it was a part

and parcel of labelling them as such in Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia) and are highly likely to confront wildlife in sites of land distribution.

It was not only the giants who claimed their space in Aralam. Sureshan, whom we met before in Block 13, was struggling to protect his young cashew trees from the deer. The real troublemaker was a tick locally known as *vattan* that had a proclivity to inhabit deer antlers. Irritated deer rubbed horns against young plants, killing them (figure 7.8). Sureshan expressed utter helplessness as the law prohibited killing wildlife in protected zones: “We have been put here to look after the animals. You can’t touch them.”



Figure 7.8: A Wilting Pepper Vine. The vine is wilting after a deer crushed it under its antlers in frenzy to remove the ticks on it. Image by author.

These messy, intermeshed narratives on livelihood insecurity, uncultivable terrain, and human conflict with neighbours from other species point to a larger picture of the residents' struggle to form a relationship with the land provided to them. Narratives of feeling dumped, or feeling they were brought to look after the wildlife, fractured people's efforts to establish (from Latin *stabilire*: "make stable") a life on Aralam. The narratives expose how land distribution effectively became a means of disposing of protesting landless Adivasis who broke into land struggles. Similar abandonments in the 22 other land distribution sites add testimony to this observation. The welfare rice, the food provided at the worksite, the primary health centre, and the promise of elephant fencing, then, merely work to keep this disposed population alive in a life that the state envisaged for the Adivasis.

The state life in Aralam further reveals that a land struggle does not end with receiving land: the struggle *with* the land goes on. Far from being transformative, this mode of providing land continues to compound the marginalised status of the Adivasis. As was seen in the last chapter, the Kerala government works on Adivasi landlessness using its flawed estimate of the number of landless Scheduled Tribe households in the province; the figure was 11,594 in 2018 (KLA 2018e). As those who were already provided land are not included in this figure, it means that the large number of people who are compelled to abandon distributed land and return to their old colonies are back to square one. Landlessness is thus constantly reproduced. Land distribution becomes a means of prolonging and further continuing the perpetual struggles of the Paniyas.

The Meaning of Land Title

Rajan, who appeared in the vignette that opened this chapter, held a slightly different view from Mini. In Rajan's view, conflict with the wildlife was not the real problem. He had given up on his plot in Block 13 and now lived in his wife's colony outside the Aralam campus. As

noted earlier, Rajan had been associated with the Adivasi Dalit Federation, which led the struggle of 2001 in Aralam, and later joined the Adivasi wing of the RSS. He categorically stated that the tax on his land should be paid by him, not the government. *Kaivasharekha* was just a paper with the occupants' photo on it. This made me doubt whether the substantive rights that Rajan wished for were private property rights. The *kaivasharekha* did not allow the alienation of land and put further restrictions on its use.

The *kaivasharekha* was a theme that came up repeatedly in my interlocutors' narratives on their relationship with the land provided. The term literally means "a document of having in hand." Since the Malayalam term more accurately describes the limited rights that this document provides, I prefer it over "Record of Rights," the term used commonly in translation.[42] In practice, the document simply says that land has been distributed to a particular household. Rama, a woman from the Karimpala community residing in Block 10, put it like this:

> "It is like taking someone else's land on lease. That is how our lives are now. What is the point? We get some welfare benefits if we show the *kaivasharekha*, that's all…If we had known about it, we would not have…"
>
> "We don't have any foundation here," interrupted Sindhu, the tribal promoter who was accompanying me, with this categorical statement. Sindhu resided in Block 10 and had lost her coconut saplings to tuskers and felt she was "dumped" in Aralam. She explained:

[42] The document that is distributed to non-Scheduled Tribe households under the Kerala Land Assignment Act 1960 is called a *pattayam*, translated in English as title, and allows sale or gift after a period of embargo. As Nayak (2015) notes, the land records taxonomy in India is a complex maze. I stick with the Kerala context here to retain focus on the story of the Paniyas' relationship with distributed land.

> "We can only take the *melaadaayam* ("yield from the top"). Actually the land is still with the government. It is just that we don't have to leave this place. The trees are all reserved – the mangoes, the cashew – all of it. We can cut them only if they dry up, not for any other purpose."

The *kaivasharekha* is bound by the Kerala Land Assignment to Scheduled Tribes Rules 2008.[43] It does not allow the sale or gifting of the land. Neither can the land be used as collateral for loans. Although agricultural loans from recognised banks are allowed on paper, this is practically never approved. Residents also cannot cut trees, including branches, even if it is to clear space for building a house. Mini from Block 7 once mentioned that the trees were numbered in many plots and listed in the *kaivasharekha* in the others. To use the insightful framework on rights to resources put forth by Schlager and Ostrom (1992), the *kaivasharekha* merely allows access to land and withdrawal of permitted products, but not the right to manage the land or decide what products can be withdrawn. Also not granted are the rights to decide who can or cannot access the resource (the right to exclude), since the TRDM administration can withdraw any pre-existing trees or plants from the land and take up improvements on it, or the right to sell or gift the land (the right to alienate).[44] As such, the holders of the *kaivasharekha* are simply "authorised users," the category that has the least number of rights.

[43] These Rules were formulated under the Kerala Land Assignment Act 1960. Note that these laws (and the TRDM project) pertain to the distribution of *revenue* land owned by the provincial government and are implemented by the Revenue Department. They are distinct from the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 which pertains to *forest* land and is administered by the Scheduled Tribes Development Department. The land document given under FRA is also called a *kaivasharekha*/Record of Right, but permits limited cutting of trees for development purposes.

[44] The "bundle of rights" framework of Schlager and Ostrom (1992) is as follows:

		Position of User of Resource			
		Owner	Proprietor	Claimant	Authorised User
Rights	Access and Withdrawal	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Management	✓	✓	✓	
	Exclusion	✓	✓		
	Alienation	✓			

Sureshan from Block 13 had not been able to get a loan because the *kaivasharekha* could not be used as collateral since there was no land tax payment receipt available on the plot and the land could not be forfeited. The alternative could have been to find a government employee to stand as guarantor, but as Sureshan, pointed out, the Paniyas did not have any such social capital. Meanwhile, Shantha, who lived in her old colony now, could not go back to the land she had received in Block 9 because she had no house there and could not cut the rubber standing there to find a piece of land to build one. Curiously, Shantha had chosen that plot *because* it had rubber. She and her husband were workers on the Farm before the land distribution project came and knew its geography well. They knew that Block 10, where they were allotted land under TRDM, would be either rocky or frequented by wildlife. While participating in the original struggle of 2001, the couple squatted on the plot in Block 9 and insisted they be allocated land there. Latex was tapped until her husband was alive. Shantha could not manage it thereafter. Years of manual labour on the Farm had given her stomach ulcers and body aches. Struggling to speak when I met her, Shantha sighed: "I wish the government had not given us any land. Who knows where they will dump us!" The remark is striking as it shows the recurring theme of feeling "dumped" on the site: in the case of Shantha, the feeling was associated with the land that she had fought hard for, but which effectively provided her with only limited user rights.

Rajan's view that the tax on his land should be paid by him started to make more sense now. Rather than a desire for private property, his words revealed the frustration of being on land that provided limited user rights. In his own words, "When the governments change, they can do whatever they want when with the *kaivasharekha*. They are threatening us by asking why we are not going back to Aralam." When C.K. Janu, whom he was a follower of, formed her own party and allied with the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance, Rajan also took the leap, moving on to become a member of the RSS. Frustration had been

building up. This was most evident when he said that he could stand with the Maoists if it was to help his community. There was no contradiction here; Rajan's leap to the RSS and simultaneous support for the Maoists revealed how (reproduced) landlessness was pushing him to deep despair and restlessness. The government was indeed planning to take back the *kaivasharekhas* from those who were not residing in the land distributed, as the Scheduled Tribes Development Minister's submission in the Legislative Assembly indicated (KLA 2018d). During the fieldwork period, a warning was issued about the planned retrieval of the *kaivasharekha* (Manorama 2018). The document was thus being used as an instrument of threat to force residents to come back and live in Aralam to make the project work.

The larger picture that emerged was how the state envisioned the Adivasis' relationship with land. Thinking with Li (2010), the *kaivasharekha* betrayed paternalistic, condescending assumptions about Adivasis that had crept into this vision – that Adivasis were not capable of managing lands given to them and that land would be alienated if given to them with the full range of rights possible. Here we see how the residents in Aralam were living a state life, rather than the way they saw their own lives. A part of this assumption rested on the idea that providing land to Adivasis would magically improve their lives, given the perceived Adivasi-land bond. As my interlocutors repeatedly pointed out, there was nothing essentialist in their relationship with land – forming a relationship with land was an everyday struggle that involved negotiating state-provided rights over the land.

Rights and restrictions associated with Adivasi lands is a vexed issue (Kannabiran 2016, Sundar 2009, Wahi and Bhatia 2018). Academics and activists have consistently criticised the dilution of Adivasi land laws that include the prohibition on alienation, notably in instances like the Forest Rights Act (Sonavane and Gandhi 2018), the Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act (Upadhya 2009) and the Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act (Rao 2009). Such prohibitions on Adivasi land sale have been used as a check against predatory land acquisition (Wahi and

Bhatia 2018). The dilutions effectively allow the easy purchase of Adivasi lands by the state or by private parties. Land alienation has indeed been a part of the reason why the Paniyas (and other landless communities in Aralam) have been landless in the first place. In the case of the *kaivasharekha*, it can be seen that the land recipients' demand is not that they wished to sell off lands, but that they are given substantive rights to improve their lives on land that is useable/cultivable. Let alone sale, the document does not even allow autonomous management of the resources on the land. This is where Li's insights on paternalistic assumptions held by the state become incredibly relevant. The title document clearly emerges as crucial for the residents to find meaning in their relationship with the land given.

Clubbing the Communities Together

Not everyone was discouraged by the limitations of the *kaivasharekha*. Kunhikannan, a resident from Block 10, agreed that the *kaivasharekha* was highly restrictive, but he was able to find a government employee to stand as guarantor for a loan. "I made my contacts and got a loan," he said. Kunhikannan is from the Karimpala community and had lived earlier in Alakkode, not too far away from Aralam. The community was added to the list of Scheduled Tribes in 2003 through a constitutional amendment, before which it had been in the list of Scheduled Castes (GoI 2003). The community had worked for years in the rubber plantations of Syrian Christian settlers in Alakkode. When the Karimpalas received land in Aralam, they were able to take advantage of their skills in rubber and were moving ahead of the Paniyas in terms of improvements in living standards. Often this resulted in the form of patronising views about the Paniyas. Kunhikannan said:

> The problem with the Paniyas is huge. There is no education for the children, no food, no clothing, all of this is going on. They consume alcohol and tobacco 24 hours. We once had to drag their children out of the river to send them to the school. They live in the river for six months and on land only for the other six! They don't have a good relationship with people.

> Maybe because of a lack of education. They are not interested in farming. Some are doing it, but three-fourth of them are not. There is a Soman in Block 9. He is farming well. No one will say he is a Paniyan. He started going to the church, stopped drinking, and is doing well now.

It needs to be emphasised that such patronising words came out of the differences in where the two communities stood before receiving land, which impacted where they stood after coming to Aralam. The Karimpala community had itself been subjected to casteist discrimination and did not have the social power that the upper/middle castes of Kerala held.[45] The Paniyas in Aralam had not been able to convert land into other privileges or social power. Two residents belonging to the Kurichya community, also ahead in social status compared to the Paniyas, once told me: "First they need to know how to live properly. There is a lot of ignorance among them. They spend all that they get. They never save for tomorrow." The "ignorance" and "never saving" nature of the Paniyas was a complaint that I found repeatedly in my transcripts. Rama, from Block 10, once came rushing to listen to my conversation with a Paniya resident, leaving her NREGA work, and added her bit to why the Paniyas were struggling:

> They don't join our self-help groups. People like us who have *kazhivu* (capability), who have *vivaravum bodhavum* (knowledge and sensibility) should push them. Only then will they come forward. Only then will our self-help group go on. I am not bringing up caste here; I am also ST (Scheduled Tribe). If they have to be brought forward, we have to push them. What do these people do? When they see money in another group, they go join them. That is the story here.

Without overstating the relevance of these neighbourhood conversations, the larger story I would like to bring out here is how Aralam brought together diverse communities with varying sociological positions and different historical relationships with land, for the reason that they

[45] In a case heard in the High Court of Kerala in 2015 (Bail Application 919 of 2015), two Nair (upper caste) men had abused a Karimpala man by "calling his caste name and thereafter caught hold of his neck and beat on the left side of the body." A case had been filed under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 (KHC 2015).

all fell under the administrative category of Scheduled Tribes. This brings out yet another picture of living state life – living the official category. This has material implications: there is hardly any Paniya person in a tribal promoter position; self-help groups are largely run by other communities; there is also the humiliation of being patronised and castigated on a daily basis. Although all residents get their equal share of the benefits, I heard recurring references to the Paniyas having become lazy because they were given benefits for free.

In an instance that hinted at the varying positions of the communities, the TRDM manager, who was evading the researcher all the while, said in a voice of concern on the last day of fieldwork (handing me a map of Aralam):

> If you are going to submit a report to the government, please write that if Aralam is declared a Fifth Schedule zone, they should think about who will benefit most, where the Paniyas will be in that arrangement.

The manager's reference was to the Fifth Schedule of the constitution that contained special provisions for the protection of land and resources in designated areas with a majority Adivasi population. Activists had been demanding this status for Aralam. The bureaucrat was worried that even after the implementation of a measure that provided self-governance to Adivasis, the Paniyas would be left behind in terms of power and thereby social mobility in Aralam as the positions of power will be captured by the better-off communities. Living the state life, thus, had further marginalisation in store for the Paniyas.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I explore some of the larger takeaways that can be drawn from the specific experiences of the Paniyas after receiving land in Aralam. First, a land distribution site can be visualised as an assemblage with elements brought together with the hope that they will stand together. The land, the project design, the administrative set-up, the laws governing the

site and the people who are brought there could be pictured as some of the constituent elements as shown above in this chapter. Also assembled are the goal of redistribution and assumptions about the Adivasi-land relationship.

Second, the chapter showed how landfare in Kerala worked with respect to the Adivasis. Aralam effectively became a site of disposing of protesting landless Adivasis. An effort to ensure social justice thus ended up as one that further aggravated their marginalisation. Such measures neither pay attention to the specificity of the Paniyas' marginalisation nor to the meaning of building a functional relationship with land and end up being merely affirmative and not transformative redistribution, to use Fraser's terms. As Aralam showed, devoid of livelihood opportunities, facing constant conflict with wildlife, and living under constant stigma and the threat of eviction, the Paniyas live a limited life that is kept going with welfare measures.

Third, the layout of a land distribution programme can contribute to such marginalisation. In the case of Aralam, we saw that the way land was distributed, the kind of rights that were provided and the assumptions that went behind how Adivasis were supposed to establish themselves in Aralam contributed to their marginalisation. These observations also betray paternalistic notions about the Adivasis needing state protection, particularly seen in the case of the *kaivasharekha*. While people are articulate about the rights they want, they seem to be stuck in state life.

***

8 | Conclusion

This thesis explored the land and livelihood struggles of the Paniya Adivasi community in Kerala and made three interrelated arguments that pertained to their position in the local growth trajectory, the claims on the state generated by this position, and the state's responses. First, the thesis argued that the position of the Paniyas in the local growth path revealed the localised characteristics and modes of generation of a relative surplus population. The Paniyas were understood as a relative surplus population facing extremely precarious employment, punctuated by long spells of unemployment. At the same time, they had access to a wide array of welfare programmes provided by the state – both universal and Adivasi-specific – and commanded high wages in principle. These aspects of their position set them apart from labouring populations in many other parts of India and prevented them from becoming footloose migrant labourers. Yet, they faced livelihood expulsions from multiple sectors simultaneously. The thesis demonstrated seven different sectors from which such expulsions were underway. Based on these empirical observations, the thesis argued that the Paniyas were in an "in-between" position of becoming less relevant to the local growth path. While they were not entirely disconnected from capitalism as some scholars argue for sections of the labouring population in other locations, they increasingly found their labour standing outside the many drivers of the local growth path – from tourism to construction to cash crop farming, among others. Narrowing into one of the livelihood expulsions, the thesis explored how both the consideration of the Paniyas by the upper-caste farmers as baggage from the past and the Paniyas' resistance to their oppression played a part in rendering them superfluous from the capitalist ginger farming sector.

The thesis went through the history of dispossession that the Paniyas have faced and demonstrated that this was a slow process of losing access to land and forests spanning centuries, marked by various waves of settlement in Wayanad district by outsiders, changes in political authority, and a gradual shift from precapitalist to capitalist relations. Through this exposition, the thesis established early on that land was not merely seen as a fallback option in the wake of precarious livelihoods, but was a signifier of autonomy, justice, social power, identity, and belonging. The thesis demonstrated that the complexities of the Paniyas' historical position made the issue of state efforts of "restoration" of "alienated" lands, which took as their reference the loss of lands from Adivasis to non-Adivasis in the more recent times, a fraught issue.

Second, the thesis argued that the Paniyas' claims on the Kerala state and the latter's responses displayed an underlying tension. The Paniyas voiced their demand in clear terms as cultivable land. The state responded to these claims through an array of mechanisms related to the provision of land, which I collectively called landfare. Landfare was shown to work through the reduction of the complex social problem of landlessness into a target figure for elimination, through projectisation of land distribution, and through non-distribution of available land. In addition, the landfare measures were combined with the injection of a host of welfare measures into the colonies and resettlement sites. This scenario showed a shift from the idea of substantive land redistribution that provided the claimants with social and political control over land to providing land and welfare in such a way that they only helped subsidise the cost of reproducing labour power. The implication was that the livelihood struggles of the Paniyas continued even after receiving land. In many sites of land distribution, the Paniyas were forced to abandon the land received from the state, as they found themselves unable to farm or avail wage employment in the remote resettlement sites.

Third, the thesis demonstrated that the efforts of the state in Kerala to address the land claims of the Paniyas betrayed the assumptions that it held about Adivasis, a scenario that resulted in the land recipients living the life envisaged by the state, or what I called "state life," rather than the life they wished to lead. While the land struggles placed a clear demand for cultivable land that provided them with substantive control over the land, the state's landfare measures were directed at putting out the land struggles. The occasional compromises reached with Adivasi leaders and the land recipients' own observation that they felt they were disposed of in the resettlement sites corroborate this argument. The assumption that any land would suffice was rejected by the Adivasis. The lens of state life helped understand how the state in Kerala managed its surplus populations that were erupting into agitations for land. The injection of welfare programmes could be seen as a part of this management process and constituted a form of "make live" mode of biopolitics. State life was managed through an elaborate Scheduled Tribes Development Department, with its functionaries extending all the way from the provincial capital to the colonies.

While the experiences of the Paniyas are specific to their location, I believe that many aspects of this story can have wider relevance. First, the thesis demonstrated the importance of understanding a surplus population in its localised context, by exploring the particular ways in which surplus populations get produced. At the same time, the contradictory scenarios generated by this experience can find reverberations in other places. For instance, the struggle for cultivable land in contexts ridden with either agrarian crises or a shift away from farm-based livelihoods can be found in several other locations where Adivasis/indigenous peoples have sought a livelihood in farming. The thesis showed that the general trend of deagrarianisation could coexist with claims for cultivable land, sparked by historical and spatial expulsions working in conjunction with contemporary livelihood expulsions.

Second, while the theme of expulsion from livelihoods is one that can be found in most places where capitalist relations have taken root, the thesis demonstrated the value of locating the expulsions against the backdrop of the specificities of the local development growth path. The case of the Paniyas showed that their dispossession and perpetual struggles were not *merely* products of India's neoliberal turn, but a culmination of complex processes through which the development pathway of Kerala took shape, as elaborated in Chapter 2. At the same time, the thesis demonstrated the importance of studying agrarian changes in neoliberal times, exemplified by the consumption of nature for tourism, the expansion of the construction sector, and the advent of speculative cash cropping as an escape route from the agrarian crisis, in understanding the livelihood expulsions of the Paniyas.

Third, the lens of landfare demonstrated by the thesis allows for an enquiry into the range of measures that the state in any location or on any scale uses to manage the land claims of its surplus populations. In locations where land struggles exist alongside state experiments in welfare provision, the tensions or synergies between landfare and welfare – in the actual measures used as well as ideologies behind them – can serve as a useful way to understand how land claims are addressed. Landfare provides a stronger lens to look at state responses to land claims when compared with frameworks that classify countries into compartments like distribution, redistribution, non-distribution, and re-concentration (Borras and Franco 2010).

Fourth, the thesis demonstrated the usefulness of the lens of state life in identifying the assumptions held by the state regarding the target population of landfare. This lens aids analysis of the ways in which the lived experience of the people and their original claims diverge from the ideas and ideologies contained in the life that the state envisages for them in the original settlements as well as resettlement sites. In the case of the Paniya colonies, the thesis demonstrated how these markers of landlessness, caste-based marginalisation, and spatial expulsion had become units of welfare governance and thus a part of state life.

From Colonies to Resettlement Sites and Back

The empirical part of the thesis demonstrated the journey of the Paniyas from the colonies, where they faced livelihood expulsions and broke out in land struggles, to the resettlement sites and back, during which they encountered landfare and experienced state life. The thesis first introduced readers to the dwelling sites of the Paniyas and showed how these cramped settlements were a product of history, agrarian changes, and caste-based discrimination. The colonies are dynamic, transitioning from the *paadis* to contemporary colonies, and in parallel, moving from pre-capitalist production relations to the capitalist ones. The thesis brought out how spatial expulsion worked, and how the state – through legislation and sabotaging of land redistribution efforts – was a part of the problem. The celebrated land reforms of Kerala were flawed from the beginning. The effect was that the intimate violence of the lived experience of the colonies made them the birthplace of numerous land struggles. This part of the thesis also went over why the notion of territory – commonly considered closely linked to the Adivasi identity (or the indigenous identity elsewhere) – becomes a vexed issue to deal with in the case of the Paniyas. Scattered between private properties of the affluent communities, their territorial access rights were curtailed through a long process, dating all the way back to at least the fifteenth century.

With this introduction to *where* the land claims originated, the thesis moved on to juxtapose their claims for cultivable land against the backdrop of the agrarian crisis underway in Kerala. The agrarian crisis was a part of the larger agrarian changes underway in the state, the chapter argued. The chapter delineated the multidirectional and simultaneous expulsions that the Paniyas faced and argued that the land claims made better sense when placed in the context of these contemporary expulsions. These expulsions were linked to a number of changes occurring in the Wayanadan landscape – deagrarianisation, urbanisation, closure of forests, and expansion of the tourism sector, among others – each of which was linked to the

stealthy, subtle work done by capital in the countryside. It was also shown how the Paniyas' expulsion from social mobility through education, employment, and distributed land was enmeshed in these agrarian changes in intricate ways. The fast replacement of the Paniyas in the construction sector and the remaining paddy farming in Wayanad by migrant labourers from the east of India further showed that the Paniyas' wage labour was becoming less and less relevant to the local growth path. The position of the Paniyas in the local caste hierarchy and the interactions with their upper-caste neighbours were demonstrated as key to all these processes. Through these empirical observations, the chapter showed that the received wisdom in the scholarship that the labouring classes combine multiple, insecure, fragmented livelihoods, does not mean labourers can smoothly work out combinations of livelihoods. Often there is no work at all.

The thesis followed this up with a closer look at one of the ways in which the Paniyas were being rendered surplus. Speculative ginger farming, taken up by affluent Wayanadan farmers who were quitting traditional paddy farming, employed the Paniyas for nearly three decades since the enterprise began in the 1990s. However, the Paniyas were in recent times being replaced by cheaper labour. The chapter brought out that the replacement was not merely a matter of the farmers looking for cheaper labour. The Paniya labourers were always more expensive than the local labourers in Karnataka. It was rather a case of the affluent farmers wanting to let go of the historical baggage of their old relations with the Paniyas. The farmers' response was prompted by the growing resistance by the Paniyas towards the oppressive labour conditions they had to work in. The chapter further demonstrated that the Paniyas, the Syrian Christian farmers, the Lingayat landowners, and the Waddar labourers came into the ginger complex because of their own negotiations with the agrarian changes around them. Back home, this meant that the ginger sector, the only sector where the Paniyas migrated in large numbers, became closed to them. When situated in the midst of a development experience that has been

lauded for its welfare experiments in the scholarship, this migratory experience of the Paniyas showed the limits of welfare in protecting them from the livelihood expulsions they were facing.

The thesis moved on to explore the work of the state in using landfare and welfare in its responses to Adivasi land claims. State obfuscation of landlessness data, collusion with capitalist agrarian farmers in legitimising land acquired through deceit, and refusal to take over public land from the hands of plantation corporates – all showed how the state was a part of the problem. The systematic dilution of the agenda of redistributive justice into merely parcelling out land made clear that the agenda of substantive landfare had been sabotaged. Many land distribution efforts repeated the script of experiments with cooperative capitalism but ended up as failed projects. Although bureaucratic mismanagement appeared to be the most apparent reason for the failure, a closer inspection revealed how these projects were not designed to provide a sustainable means of subsistence in the first place, let alone social and political control over land. The failure was whitewashed with the generous provision of welfare measures that had neither extinguished the land claims nor lifted the Paniyas out of poverty. The consequence was dire: far from having the Paniyas as equal partners in its development experiments, the state was involved in reproducing landlessness. Land, ironically, became the weak spot in Kerala's land politics, allowing for the Hindutva co-optation of the Adivasi land question.

These arguments were corroborated with closer scrutiny of a land distribution project in the chapter that followed. The chapter looked at how a land distribution project was assembled with its key ingredients, including land, Adivasis, and assumptions about the relationship of the Adivasis with land. The assumptions meant that the Adivasis, as a group presumed to have a close, harmonious relationship with land and nature, were expected to get out of poverty merely through the reception of land. The chapter brought out the disparate

struggles that ensued and showed that land struggles did not stop with receiving land. The recipients were expected to live state life, a life envisioned by the state for the recipients, complete with a miniature replication of welfare strategies, but without any consideration given to the building of sustainable livelihood avenues. The chapter thus showed that land distribution projects perpetuated land struggles rather than ending them.

Development and Perpetual Struggles

The Paniyas' claims for cultivable land in the middle of an agrarian crisis reveal themselves as the fallout of livelihood expulsions from multiple sectors simultaneously. The agrarian crisis, and multifaceted agrarian changes do not deter the Paniyas from looking forward to subsistence farming, given the central role played by landlessness in the perpetuation of their struggles. Kerala's extensive welfare network does not prove to be fully successful in protecting the Paniyas from the vagaries of the market (as indeed was pointed out by Polanyi in the case of social protection in general). While the land struggles express the desire to be part of the development story of Kerala, they also demonstrate that welfare is not enough, and negate the idea that any land will do. The state pushes them into a state that is simply "made to live" through welfare and is not "grievable" (Butler 2009).

Kerala's development pathway, lauded in the development studies scholarship (as reviewed in Chapter 2), works in ways, in the case of landless Adivasis, that reproduce their landlessness and livelihood struggles. The land struggles of the Adivasis might be scattered and sporadic, but collectively they offer a strong critique of this pathway. Kerala may seem to offer better welfare arrangements than in the rest of the country, but to those who revel in this comparative position of the province, the land struggles of the Paniyas and other landless Adivasis indicate that this position is tenuous. Their perpetual struggles are a product of the tensions between land claims they make and the landfare responses the state undertakes, a

scenario in which alternating political coalitions have played nearly equal roles. In their rejection of the land provided to them can be seen a rejection of state life – a rejection of the idea that they can be reduced to passive recipients of land who do not have social and political control over the land, and who only receive an unproductive piece of land to hold on to and welfare measures to help reproduce their labour power.

From a larger perspective, around half a billion people in the world are currently estimated to be unemployed or lacking adequate employment (ILO 2020). As Li (2009) has argued, there are no new jobs at the lower end being created to absorb this large surplus population in contemporary capitalist growth trajectories in many locations. The case of the Paniyas can be read against the debates on non-farm futures: by refusing to migrate to the metropolitan cities in large numbers and organising land struggles when they are pushed into it, the Paniyas go against the popular view in these debates that migration to non-farm work in the cities will be the future of the labouring classes. The perspectives of the younger generation add another dimension to this scenario. There is deep disappointment and lack of hope regarding whether any meaningful land distribution will occur anytime, prompting many young Paniyas to organise struggles for education and employment in Wayanad. The importance of land ownership, however, is never denied. Whether it is learning skills or procuring a bank loan, the Paniyas' perpetual struggles reveal how land ownership forms the foundation on which other privileges are built. The diversity in the perspectives of the Paniyas demanding land was also brought out: ranging from those sticking to old hierarchies to those who have moved to a land distribution site, and from those who are holding on to land in resettlement sites despite the difficulties in farming to those who have abandoned the land provided.

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Geetha, from Wayanad, has paused writing her autobiography for now, when I speak to her on the phone in December 2020. After she left her husband's colony, she has been

shifting from one relative's colony to another's to find a place to live with her children and to find work. The struggles take up all her time. She was asked to stand in the local body elections that occurred earlier in the month since the *grama panchayath ward* in which her husband's colony was situated had a large Adivasi population. She refused, asking the political parties to first have her request for three cents of land approved.

The left lost the *ward* and the *grama panchayath*. It was a notable loss as these had been their strongholds for a long time. Geetha sternly said it was a statement made by the landless Adivasis.

She has also formed the Adivasi Unity Alliance (name changed) with a few other Paniya and Kattunaika activists to take up the issue of landlessness on a province-wide platform.

New land struggles await Wayanad in the new year.

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Appendix 1

This is an indicative list of Adivasi land struggles in Kerala in the post-colonial period, illustrating their persistence. These represent only the few that received public attention. Compiled from field notes, media reports and Bijuraj (2018).

Year	Place	Organiser(s)	Details	Status
1967-68	All over Wayanad (then not a separate district)	A. Varghese (then affiliated to CPI(M))	Struggles against the V*alli* system of bonded labour practised by upper-caste Hindu landlords. The protesters demanded a wage of 1 Re for male workers and 60 paise for female workers, apart from paddy.	Demands were met by landlords: wage set at 3 ser 75 paise for men, for women 2 ser, 60 paise.
1970 (February 9-10)	Thirunelly and Thrissilery (then Kannur district, now Wayanad)	Maoists under A. Varghese	End of bonded labour in 140 acres of an upper-caste Hindu landlords' estate	Land occupied; occupants took over the farm.
1970	Sulthan Bathery	Adivasi Swayamsevak Sangh (under the Paniya leaders K. Ellan and C. Prabhakaran)	Struggle against the eviction of Adivasi households from 7 acres for the establishment of St. Mary's college.	Compromise with protesters granted title over the same land to some households and alternative land to others.
1981	Thayyeni (Kannur district)	P.J. Baby, Naxalite leader		
1994 (January 26 onwards)	Kalpetta	Adivasi Samyuktha Samithi	Protests against delay in implementation of the 1975 Act (brought to force in 1980), protests against dilution of the Act	
1994 (February 3 onwards)	Ambukuthy (Wayanad district)	Adivasi Vikasana Pravarthaka Samithi, a banner created by the South Zone Adivasi Forum	220 Adivasi households occupied forests meant for redistribution under Kerala Private Forest (Vesting and Assignment) Act 1974. In the protests that followed, the protesters demanded the restoration of alienated lands, and the assignment of 5 acres to each landless household.	Police crushed the occupation. C.K. Janu and others were hospitalized. Janu started a hunger strike. The collector made a compromise promising action on the fifth day of the hunger strike.
1995	Cheengeri (Wayanad district)	South Zone Adivasi Forum	249 households occupied 100 acres of Cheengeri Farm land after redistribution was not done as per the plan of the original scheme launched in 1957	Police crushed the struggle. Close to 200 participants arrested

Year	Place	Organiser(s)	Details	Status
1995	Panavally (Wayanad district)	South Zone Adivasi Forum	76 households occupied18 acres of land meant to be marked as vested forest were occupied.	102 participants arrested and later released. Shacks burnt. Participants returned to the site and put up shacks.
1996 (26 February to 20 March)	Thiruvanantha puram	C.K. Janu and 8 other Adivasi women	Hunger strike in front of the Secretariat against dilution of the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction of Transfer of Land and Restoration of Alienated Land) Act 1975 through amendment.	The government went ahead with the amendment on 23 September. This sparked further protests against revenue minister and Wayanad collector.
1996 (2 Septembe r onwards)	Thiruvanantha puram	CPI(ML-Red Flag)	Protests in front of the Secretariat against the amendment of the 1975 Act. This included burning the amendment bill.	On September 23, when the bill was passed, protesters barged into the legislative assembly. In Attappady, a mourning protest was organised for the bill for 41 days, following which the bill was "cremated".
1996 (4 October)	Palakkad (Palakkad district)	Ayyankali pada, under 4 Maoist leaders of the Kerala Communist Party	The Palakkad district collector was captured and threatened with electrocution. The protestors demanded the restoration of Adivasi lands alienated to settlers.	Compromise to not arrest and promise to meet demands. The leaders were however arrested within months and sentenced to three years in prison in 2003.
1996	Chimmini dam (Thrissur district)	CPI(ML) Janashakthi	Protest against eviction of Adivasis for a dam.	
1999	Peravoor (Kannur district)	CPI(ML)	9.5 acres of government land in Thirvonappuram	1 acre each promised
2001	Kalloor (Wayanad district)	Adivasi Samara Sangham organised by CPI(ML)	Women blocked a mobile ration van and distributed food grains in colonies, following the death of 24 Adivasi persons out of hunger	
2001	Kundala (Idukki district)	C.K. Janu and Geethanandan	Adivasis occupied 61.21 acres that were originally Adivasi land but were used to construct the Centre for Continuing Education	The government promised not to encroach on Adivasi land.
2001	Thiruvanantha puram	Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha	Secretariat- *Kudilketti Samaram*	
2002	Aralam (Kannur district)			
2002	Sulthan Bathery (Wayanad district)	Adivasi Vikasana Samithi	Protest against non-distribution of ration to residents of Adivasi colonies in Pulpally panchayat	

Year	Place	Organiser(s)	Details	Status
2002	Nelliyampathy (Palakkad district)	Adivasi Samara Sangham	Around 100 households 350 acres occupied and shacks erected after earlier promises to provide land were not kept.	
2003	Muthanga (Wayanad district)	Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha	Occupation of Muthanga forests	The struggle was crushed by the police. 283 households selected as beneficiaries recently, 200 received land as of 20 Feb 2020.
2007	Chengara (Pathanamthitta district)	Sadhujana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedi	7,500 households (including a few Dalit households) occupied 6,000 acres of plantation land	Ongoing
2012	Irulam (Wayanad district)	Adivasi Kshema Samithi	1,300 households (at the beginning) occupied reserved forests	Ongoing
2012	Arippa (Kollam district)	Adivasi Dalit Munnetta Samithi	Occupation of Arippa forests	Ongoing
2014	Olakara (Thrissur district)		46 households occupied Peechi reserved forests	Police crushed the struggle. 45 people arrested. Two years later, land was promised.
2014	Thiruvanantha puram	Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha	Nilpusamaram (standing stir) in front of the Secretariat. Demands of the 2001 struggle renewed.	7.693 hectares of vested forests to be redistributed.
2016 (15 January)	Moorthikunnu, Mangalam Dam (Palakkad district)		22 families. The government had decided to distribute 14.67 acres of struggle land after converting them into revenue land from forest land. There was also a decision 10 months ago to provide alternative land (29 acres in total) in Agali. Not implemented.	
2017	Kakkathode (Wayanad district)		Occupation of forest patch after the colony flooded by 15 households.	Land provided in a rubber farm bought from private parties. Residents abandoned the land as the sellers wanted to chop down the trees for trade. Residents are now back to the colony.
2019	Chinnakkanal (Idukky district)	Pattigavarga Ekopana Samithi	Under the 2001 agreement, 1490 acres were assigned for distribution. 822 acres not yet distributed.	
2019	Thovarimala (Wayanad district)	CPI(ML-Red Flag)	200 households occupied land that comes under the Vested Forests Act.	Struggle crushed by police.