INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the vulnerable communities, in terms of their economic deprivation and social backwardness within the Indian social structure has been the focus of many scholarly studies with an inter-disciplinary perspective. A closer look at the internal economic differentiation and social stratification of a particular vulnerable group assumes significance, primarily from the point of its responsiveness to state welfare measures, as well as assessing the impact of capitalist incursions into their indigenous economies, which arguably affects different sections differently.

1.1. Tribal Situation in India

The Scheduled Tribes\(^1\) of India are the aboriginal or indigenous people or the vulnerable groups of the country. They represent the oldest ethnological groups of our national population referred to as Adivasis or original inhabitants. Their origin has been traced to such races as the Proto-Australoids who one time are believed to have practically covered the whole of India. It is believed that India derived its name Bharat from the mighty Bharat tribe.

The Government of India is identifying the tribes by the following characteristics of their behaviour, \textit{viz.}, i) primitive way of living, ii) habitation in remote and less easily accessible area, and iii) nomadic habits.\(^2\) At one level, a tribe is like any other community. At another level, the tribes are communities with distinctive traits.\(^3\) The Anthropological Survey of India under the 'People of India Project' identifies 461 tribal communities in India. They are enumerated at 67, 583, 800 persons constituting 8.08 per cent of tribal population in the country.\(^4\)
The geographical area of tribal concentration can be broadly divided into the following seven regions:

i) Central-Southern Tribal Region (Dandakaranya Region),

ii) Central-Northern Tribal Region (Hazaribagh-Maikal Region),

iii) Western Tribal Region (Aravalli-Sahyadri Region),

iv) North-Eastern Tribal Region,

v) North-Western Tribal Region,

vi) Southern Tribal Pockets, and

vii) The Oceanic Groups.

Each region has some specific features, traits, social value systems, cultural fabrics and way of life. A detailed regional study is necessary because it can provide the base for guiding the process of change in such a way that it may be in consonance with the development of the tribal communities. The areas of tribal concentration are shown in the Map (Page No.2a).

Their diversity during the pre-colonial days is reflected in their peculiar geographical locations, dense concentration in hills and forests, and the different occupational categories such as food gathering, hunting, shifting cultivation, settled cultivation, and urban oriented occupations. Nonetheless, most of the tribes in the country are in a state of transition. The ‘People of India Project’ authority, on examination of the nature of social formation and process of interaction derives that the extent of sharing of traits between tribal and non-tribal communities at the national level is as high as 96.13 per cent. In the four regions of high tribal concentration, namely, the east, north-east, central and southern India, the sharing of traits with non-tribes is as much as 35.27, 88.35, 86.52 and 89.17 per cent respectively.
A Notional Map of India Showing the Areas of Tribal Concentration and a Classification of Tribal Regions

Formal Scheme of Regional Classification:
1. Central Southern Tribal Region (Dundarapayadu Region)
2. Central Northern Tribal Region (Hazaribagh Region)
3. Western Tribal Region (Gondwana Region)
4. North Eastern Tribal Region
5. North Western Tribal Region
6. Southern Tribal Region
7. Oceanic Groups
The tribal setting is quite complex and it is a challenging task for the policy makers, planners and administrators to tackle the problem of tribal development in the country. So, the tribal situation warrants a different development perspective. It is with this premise, the Indian constitution has provided special measures and safeguards for the benefit of the tribal people.

1.1.1. Constitutional Provision for Economic Development

The strategy of development has been drawn up combining the twin elements of protection and development. Under Article 342 of the Constitution of India, certain tribes have been specified as Scheduled Tribes. In pursuance of the constitutional provisions contained in Articles 16(4) and 335, reservation in service has been provided for Scheduled Tribes. As a result of the implementation of the reservation policy, there has been considerable increase in the representation of Scheduled Tribe employees in all Departments of Government of India.7

Provisions relating to economic development of Scheduled Tribes are mainly contained in Articles 275 (1) and 339 (2). Briefly, it may be stated that in Article 275 (1), the first provision envisages, provision for grants in aid for meeting the cost of tribal schemes as may be undertaken by a State with the approval of the Union Government for the purpose of promoting the welfare of its Scheduled Tribes. As per the provision, the grant is to be made against such specific schemes as are necessary for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes and are undertaken with the prior approval of the Union Government.8

Despite a plethora of legislative measures, special safeguards and other development efforts, denial of tribal rights in sharing land and forest wealth, reversion from peasantry class to labour, large scale displacement, increasing inequalities and poverty, degraded social status causing tribal tensions, loss of identity and lack of
confidence emerged as baffling problems for the tribals as well as policy makers. The present situation demands a revival of existing development strategies and a new orientation to the perspectives of tribal development.9

1.1.2. Facets of Tribal Problems

The problems of tribes of India can broadly be classified into the following categories:

i) Socio-Cultural problems,

ii) Political-Constitutional problems,

iii) Economic problems, and

iv) Protection of tribals from exploitation.10

The socio-cultural problems are mainly related to social contacts, many a times followed by culture shock and depletion of traditional values of tribals. Ultimately, these may lead to the identification of crisis causing unrest. Invaders from inside the country had mainly one motivating force for associating with the tribes. It was to utilise the economic gains in terms of forest produce, agricultural produce or even possession of cultivable lands and mines, ores, etc. Cross culture was the outcome of the permanent settlement of the outsiders. Education, especially informal education, however, compelled tribal workers to spatial mobility. This was responsible for over exposures of alien culture, and therefore, the so called progressive tribals suffered depletion of their rich cultural heritage. For political resurgence, some constitutional measures were undertaken by the Union Government to provide rights through Fifth Schedule for the tribals. A number of seats have been reserved in the Lok Sabha as per the Constitution. But this sort of attempt to place the tribals in the main stream of political resurgence, before raising their social outlook and creating required amount of social change, should promote the interest of tribal elites who were off-shoots of former rulers. While framing the Indian Constitution, the error committed was that the reservation for Scheduled
Tribes was granted to all sections of tribes regardless of their levels of education, income and social status which created the difference between them. This led to the poor tribes becoming poorer, and the rich tribes becoming richer. Following the principle of reservation in employment, the higher posts too could be grabbed by the affluent section of Scheduled Tribes. Dereservation of the progressive sector of Scheduled Tribes could not be followed due to political pressure.

Economic problems of the tribals should have first attracted the attention of the government after obtaining freedom, but age old isolation policy of tribals continued to mar tribal development. Keeping the tribals isolated in remote geographical setting, as stipulated by the government, did more harm rather than any good. Even the culture compulsion and existing social framework of the tribals went against their economic development. Subsidy to tribal beneficiaries under various programmes was supposed to act as important stimuli to induce capital formation in disguise, but perhaps ideas and concepts of development travelled to the tribal areas much later than that of supply of agricultural inputs and equipments. This added to several cases of adoption gaps of new technology, namely, in farming, cattle keeping or even in health and nutrition programmes which aimed at raising the production and quality of life respectively followed by boosting up of per capita income. Savings from out of family income, either for promoting capital formation or even to meet out necessities on rainy days, are no issues for their consideration. All these are deep-rooted in their economic profile of very limited wants and very limited aspirations. They lead a simple life and adopt simple modes of direct production of essential food items.

Due to interaction with the outer world of greedy people, whose very action is income / profit oriented, the tribals also have the growing needs of money to pay off obligation of government dues. Therefore, the money-lenders were the first with whose contact the tribals came to get loans. With this the problem of land alienation was started.
Following malafide procedure, documents were prepared by the money-lenders in their own interest and tribals gradually lost their lands to them. Hence, all the above said problems of the tribals have resulted in migration.

Conceptually, migration is a phenomenon antidote to fixity or permanence. It is loaded with the sense of mobility from one place to another. In the context of tribal migration, the concept denotes non-stagnant tribal society. Stability, however, differs from stagnation, as the latter carries stigma of non-exposure and traditionalism. Self-sustainability is a feature of stability in contrast to stagnation, which is loaded with staleness. The situation, when migration is a common feature of the tribal society, implies that their old age stability has been disturbed, followed by loss of their socio-economic equilibrium. Self-sufficiency has been the common core of tribal economy. This allowed them to survive with their limited wants and nature’s bounties, by using direct mode of production, in labour intensive and capital light economic system. Basically, there are two dimensions of migration of the tribals, viz., spatial migration and occupational migration.

For diversification of tribal economy, these two migrations are essentially required. With the onset of changes in its specific features through education, specialisation, new technology and modern occupations, tribal society is no longer considered a tribal society. It is described as having become a caste society, peasant society or socially differentiated society as the case may be. The tribes are viewed as being absorbed into the larger society, in the process of losing total identity. At present, in economic literature, tribes are studied against the backdrop of the processes at work in those societies.

1.1.3. Development of Tribals Since 1947

The right to develop, while maintaining the cultural identity of the ethnic groups, has been recognised by United Nations Commission way back in 1982. Development invokes mobilisation of natural resources, augmentation of trained manpower, capital and
technical know-how and their utilisation for the attainment of constantly rising national goals, higher living standards and change over from a traditional to a modern society.\textsuperscript{13}

In the field of social justice, the development plan of India has two major components. The first is to improve the living standards of the weaker sections of the community. The second is the reduction of inequalities in the asset distribution and prevention of concentration of economic wealth in the hands of a few. Though there has been some improvement in the economic well-being of the poor due to several poverty alleviation programmes, the fact is that more than forty per cent of the people still remain below the poverty line even after five decades of planning.

India's development strategy and economic policy since independence were guided by the objectives of accelerating growth of output and employment, but with social justice and equity. Though there were differences in emphasis in the objectives of different plans, the long term objective of planning in India can be summarised as follows:

i) a sizable increase in national income,

ii) to create sufficient employment opportunities,

iii) to remove poverty and reduce inequality,

iv) to attain self-reliance, and

v) changing traditional economy into a modern one.\textsuperscript{14}

The central objective of tribal development has been their socio-economic progress, with a view to integrate them with the mainstream on a footing of equality, while maintaining their culture autonomy to the largest extent possible. Various planned efforts have been made since independence for economic development of the tribals. The first attempt was made in 1954 when 43 special multi-purpose development projects, each with an additional outlay of Rs.27 lakhs for five years, were started to supplement the community development programmes, which aimed at a comprehensive development of rural areas.
The situation was reviewed in 1956 by Elwin Committee, which recommended a cautious approach in the introduction of multiplicity of schemes in tribal areas. On review, the projects were substituted by a less intensive model of tribal development blocks in 1957. The norm for a tribal development block was confined to an area of 150 to 200 sq. miles and a population of about 25,000. The blocks were supposed to work for tribal population under intensive development programme. They were to concentrate on the following four main activities, viz., economic development, education, health and communication.

The tribal development programme was subjected to comprehensive review by the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, generally called Dhebar Commission. The Commission noted that the pace of development in tribal areas was slow. The recommendation of Dhebar Commission was implemented in the Third Five-Year Plan (1966-69). Covering 40 per cent of total tribal population from 500 blocks all over India. During the Fourth Five-Year Plan, six tribal development agencies were started as pilot schemes in various states. In the Fourth Five-Year Plan, about 44 crores were allotted to these agencies. The allocations were in addition to the normal outlays. The tribal situation was again reviewed on the eve of the Fifth Five-Year Plan by a task force on ‘Development of Tribal Areas’, constituted by the Planning Commission. A tribal sub-plan strategy was evolved in 1974-75. The planning in India has set itself the following tasks to the tribal population to make them live in a modern way:

(i) to build a two-way communication between the tribal communities and their neighbours in the overall framework of national integration, and
(ii) to protect the resource base and cultural apparatus of the tribal population, so that it can serve as a basis for collective efforts for meeting modern challenges.

While preparing the tribal sub-plan aiming at area development with a special focus on tribal families, a thorough review of tribal problems was made, with attention to the following:
(i) identification and demarcation of areas of tribal concentration,
(ii) identification of socio-cultural barriers and promotion of change in development,
(iii) assessment of potentialities, special problems and needs of tribal areas,
(iv) assessment of the resources available for sub-plan,
(v) formulation of sectoral programmes, and
(vi) devising suitable administrative set up.

The main components of tribal sub-plan strategy are Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDP), Modified Area Development Approach (MADA) and Pockets and Primitive Tribal Group Projects (PPTP). For implementation of Tribal sub-plan strategy, 191 Integrated Tribal Development Projects have been carved in all the States and Union Territories. The tribal sub-plan is being financed through the resources drawn from the following:

i) flow of funds from State plan outlays,
ii) sectoral outlays in the Union ministries for tribal areas,
iii) special Union assistance allocation for tribal areas, and
iv) institutional finance, mainly from banks.

The quantum of the outlays in the State Plan for the purpose is aimed at, keeping in view, the following during the Seventh Five-Year Plan:

i) the total population,
ii) the geographical area,
iii) the comparative level of development, and
iv) the state of social services.

Total financial outlays for tribal sub-plan and tribal areas from First Five-Year Plan to Ninth Five-Year Plan are as follows:
Table - 1.1: Financial Outlay for Tribal Sub-Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Year Plan</th>
<th>Total outlay (Rs. in crores)</th>
<th>Funds to tribal development (Rs. in crores)</th>
<th>Percentage to total outlay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Plan</td>
<td>1,953.42</td>
<td>19.93</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Plan</td>
<td>4,665.22</td>
<td>42.92</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Plan</td>
<td>8,564.40</td>
<td>50.53</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Plan</td>
<td>15,000.00</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Plan</td>
<td>36,269.10</td>
<td>1,182.00</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Plan</td>
<td>1,09,343.94</td>
<td>5,500.00</td>
<td>5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh Plan</td>
<td>1,80,102.92</td>
<td>10,500.00</td>
<td>5.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth Plan</td>
<td>1,89,881.75</td>
<td>11,241.00</td>
<td>5.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth Plan</td>
<td>2,27,106.59</td>
<td>13,422.00</td>
<td>5.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: One crore is equal to 10 million.

From the above table, it would appear that after introduction of sub-plan strategy there has been substantial increase in flow of funds to tribal sub-plan areas. From the Eighth Five-Year Plan onwards, the aim of tribal plan was at micro level planning, and for this purpose the process of participatory development was started.

A participatory planning process is an essential pre-condition for ensuring equity as well as accelerating the rate of growth of the country as stated in the Ninth Five-Year Plan. The principal task of the Ninth Five-Year Plan was to usher in a new era of people oriented planning, in which not only the governments at the Union and the State, but the people at large, particularly the poor, can fully participate. The Ninth Five-Year Plan identified human development as its main focus, and it also focussed on provision of
basic minimum services, etc., with the objective of empowerment of socially disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as agents of socio-economic change and development.

To monitor the developmental activities of tribal development, the newly created Ministry of Tribal Affairs at Union Government and Ministry of Adi-Dravida and Tribal Welfare at State Government have been entrusted with the onerous task of looking after the development of Scheduled Tribes in India. Each Ministry and Department is a nodal Ministry or Department, concerning its sector.

While the poverty alleviation programmes of tribals have been strengthened in successive years, the multiplicity of programmes, being viewed as separate programmes in themselves, resulted in a lack of proper social intermediation. To rectify the situation, the Government of India has decided to restructure the self employment programmes. A new programme known as “Swarna Jayanthi Gram Swarojgar Yojana”\(^{16}\) has been launched in April, 1999. This is a holistic programme covering all aspects of self-employment, such as, organisation of the poor into self-help groups, training, credit, technology, infrastructure and marketing. This programme was funded by the Government of India and the respective States in the ratio of 75 : 25.

Non-Governmental organisations or voluntary organisations working in tribal areas are of good help in furthering tribal welfare and development. At present, in most of the places in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, the type of important activities taken up by the voluntary organisations in tribal areas are: establishment of balwadis and creches, tailoring and craft centres, adult educational centres, functional literacy centres and nutritional programmes.
1.1.4. Tribal Unrest

The gap between the targets and physical achievements of various tribal development schemes is widening beyond control. The tribal feels that he is blackmailed in the name of welfare. The achievements are generally assessed in terms of financial investment rather than the goods delivered. The wide publicity given to the tribal welfare schemes has aroused their aspirations, and its failure to deliver the expected results create social tension. The social tensions in tribal areas are also due to depletion of natural resources, regressive forest policy, poverty, inequality, religion based welfare, atrocities against Scheduled Tribes and cultural lag. The reasons for their discontentment may be broadly divided into seven following categories\(^\text{17}\):

i) inadequate implementation of constitutional safeguards,

ii) denial of participation of tribals in development process,

iii) lack of accountability,

iv) lack of tribal leadership,

v) land alienation and displacement without adequate rehabilitation,

vi) exploitation in forestry and other economic activities, and

vii) inequality between primitive tribal groups and progressive tribal groups.

Hence, there is a need for careful review of the situation for tribals. Measures for the economic upliftment should be formulated keeping in view their needs.

1.2. Tribal Setting in Tamil Nadu

The Scheduled Tribe population in Tamil Nadu is 5.75 lakhs. They are widely dispersed in 21 districts. The tribal areas of Tamil Nadu can be broadly divided into two major geographical dimensions, viz., the eastern coastal line, and the mountainous regions of the north and west. The average elevation of the eastern ghats is 2,000 ft and the highest peak is 6,000 ft. This range is not continuous in Tamil Nadu. The important hill ranges of Tamil Nadu are the
Jawadhi hills and Yelagiri hills of North Arcot district, the Kalrayan hills of South Arcot, the Pachamalai, Kollimalai and Yercaud ranges of Salem, the Anamalai of Coimbatore, the Sitteri hills of Dharmapuri, the Palani hills of Madurai, and the Nilgiris hills.

There are 33 Scheduled Tribes in Tamil Nadu. Considerable ambiguity exists in regard to ethnic identity of these Scheduled Tribes. For instance, there is confusion regarding identity between Kurumbas and Kurumans, Malasar and Mahamalasar and Maduvan / Mudugar and Muthuvan in the government list of 33 tribes. Besides, there are six endogamous groups which go with the suffix Kurumba. A clear distinction between these groups was not consistently maintained in the enumeration in different censuses, making the data non-comparable for some of these groups. Hence, correct identification of tribes is still a grey area in research.

The Table-1.2 compares the picture of district-wise tribal population in the State of Tamil Nadu in 1981 and 1991. As per 1981 Census counts, Scheduled Tribes had a strength of 5.20 lakhs in Tamil Nadu. They constituted 1.07 per cent of the population of the State. A large majority of Scheduled Tribe people live in hitherto inaccessible hilly areas and only a few are living in the plain areas. These Scheduled Tribes are widely dispersed over 16 districts in the State. During 1991, some of the districts were bifurcated and trifurcated for the purpose of better administration. Hence, the number of districts where tribals are found, increased from 16 to 21. The tribal population increased from 5.20 lakhs in 1981 to 5.75 lakhs in 1991, i.e., by 10.6 per cent.

The Nilgiris is the least populated district in Tamil Nadu with 7,04,827 (1991 Census). The hills are shared mainly by the Badugas, Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, Irulas and Paniyas. The Kurumba tribes are living only in Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu in India. They constitute the dominant tribal group among different tribal groups in this district. This district is having the maximum concentration of tribal population among the different districts of Tamil Nadu.
### Table-1.2: Districtwise Tribal Population in Tamil Nadu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Chengalpet</td>
<td>46050</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>57705</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Coimbatore</td>
<td>22359</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>26313</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Dharmapuri</td>
<td>46074</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>47600</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Dindigul</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9507</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Erode</td>
<td>15191</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>192358</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Kanyakumari</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>5281</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>5373</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>8067</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Madurai</td>
<td>13646</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>12764</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>The Nilgiris</td>
<td>20874</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>25071</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>North Arcot</td>
<td>93690</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>49936</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>P.M. Thevar</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1186</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1516</td>
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<td>796</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Ramanathapuram</td>
<td>6617</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1602</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>122444</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>135984</td>
<td>3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>South Arcot</td>
<td>53775</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>58053</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Thanjavur</td>
<td>6012</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>9969</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Thiruvannamalai</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>62924</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Thiruchirappalli</td>
<td>48294</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>28139</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Thirunelveli</td>
<td>11954</td>
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<td>9007</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Tuticorin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3203</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Virudunagar</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2974</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>520226</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>575339</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The percentage is to the total population of the State.

**Source:** Census of India, 1991.
1.3. Kurumba Tribes in the Nilgiris District

According to ancient history and Madras Census Report (1891) the Kurumbas are the modern representatives of Pallavas, who were once powerful throughout Southern India. The Pallavas sovereignty was affected by Cholas during 7th and 8th century A.D. and Pallavas were scattered far and wide in South; but very little trace of their greatness now remains. The Pallavas or Kurumba sovereignty was affected by Kongu Chola and Chalukkya chiefs who succeeded in winning several victories over them. The final overthrow of Kurumba sovereignty was effected by the Chola King Adondai during 7th and 8th century A.D., and thus Kurumba tribes were scattered far and wide and spread into two groups. One group considered as wild jungle men, fled to Coorg in Mysore, and Wynad in Malabar and the others were settled in the Nilgiris.19 The representatives of this ancient race are now found as civilised tribes in Nilgiris. The name Kurumbarnad, a submission of Malabar of Kerala, still bears testimony to their once powerful position.

It may be noted that the community under discussion differs in many ways, especially in their customs. They speak among themselves a dialect of Kannada, the South Dravidian language and Tamil is spoken with others. The Tamil script is used by them. Recently Kapp and Paul Hockings,20 examined the Nilgiri Kurumba group and identified seven distinct Kurumba tribes. They are: (i) Alu Kurumbas, (ii) Palu Kurumbas, (iii) Madugas, (iv) Betta Kurumbas, (v) Jena Kurumbas, (vi) Mullu Kurumbas, and (vii) Urali Kurumbas.

1.3.1. Demographic Profile

The total population of Kurumbas was estimated to be nearly 4,684 and distributed all over the district. The women population outnumbered male population. The Kurumbas who live in nuclear families are more than in joint families. The Kurumbas favour modern education for both boys and girls. Even among the boys, there were a few
drop outs after primary school, to assist their parents in earning a livelihood. According to the Nilagiri Adivasi Welfare Association Report, there were 36.52 per cent of Kurumba literates in the Nilgiris district.  

1.3.2. Occupation

The Kurumbas' primeval occupation was shifting cultivation. They were a food gathering community. Many Kurumbas had occupational migration. The Nilagiri Adivasi Welfare Association Report showed that out of their total population, 58.92 per cent constituted workers. A majority of them, i.e., 42.75 per cent were engaged in agriculture. This was followed by 15.23 per cent of industrial workers, and 29.65 per cent were in government service. The remaining 12.29 were in various other unorganised services.

1.3.3. Food

The habits and customs of Kurumbas are worth mentioning for indicating their level of civilisation. They eat flesh and drink liquor, a favourite beverage being prepared from ragi flour (*Eleusine coracana*). They subsist on wild bamboo seeds and tender terminal vegetative part of bamboo, called odaikuttu, edible yams and roots. They collect the roots and wild yams (*Dioscorea*), part of which they eat, and the rest they exchange with farmers for grains. They prepare good food like higher caste people and relish the same.

1.3.4. Housing

The Kurumbas are regarded as very old inhabitants of this land. They live in small detached huts in the interior of the forests far away from inhabited places. The villages of Kurumbas are called Motta, Kombai or Padi. The village consists of only four or five huts made of mud and wattle with thatched roofs of grass. The front of the house was sometimes whitewashed and ornamented with crude drawings of men and animals in red earth and charcoal. They were also cave dwellers, living under safe rocky shelters and exceedingly poor
and wretched. In the field near the villages they built very low huts. Their socio-economic isolation is by no means total, as a great majority of Kurumbas live in comfortable houses. Their house plans vary greatly between the occupations. The dispersed settlement pattern is usually with sloping terrain. The building materials are invariably local timbers and tiles. Besides, the Government and voluntary organisations have built rows of houses for the tribals which are terraced with bricks, mortar and corrugated iron sheets.

1.3.5. Religious Functions and Beliefs

The Kurumbas ritualization of ceremonies is much less elaborate than that of other tribal communities. The birth of a child and wedding, though crucial, are not given much importance. However, naming of a child, ear and nose boring, and puberty attaining of a girl are some of the notable events given considerable importance. The marriage among the Kurumbas is quite amazing and is being effected by temporary marriage, marriage by purchase, marriage by justifying talents, and marriage by intrusion. In a death ceremony, the Kurumbas follow a custom of burial with elaborate rituals, which differ according to age, sex and hierarchy of the deceased. They also adopt cremation, in the case of headman of the village, and this practice is considered as an imitation of the funeral practice of Todas. The religion is essentially an ancestral culture and the Kurumbas believe and preserve their ancestral religious practice with the accretion of some Hindu deities. Kurumbas of younger generation visit Shaivite shrines or Siva temple to offer pooja. Thus, a tendency towards embracing Hinduism is much in evidence and is slowly but surely growing among the younger generation. However, the concept of reincarnation has not yet gained in their religion.

All the traditional Kurumbas were highly effective sorcerers and some are noted for their abilities to cure specific ailments either by herbal medicine or by spells. A Baduga family appoints a particular Kurumba to act as guardian and watchman to all the constituent villages.
This is a lifelong appointment, which passes from father to son, and involves warding off of magical attacks from other Kurumbas with the watchman’s non-sorcery, as well as providing the goods and services. Most Badugas still believe that the Kurumbas are the most effective of all Indian sorcerers. Among the Kurumba society, males are predominating than females. Several of the epic Baduga poems detail both the Kurumbas means of performing sorcery and their fatal effects.25

1.4. Statement of the Problem

Irrespective of the development a country has achieved, the tribals constitute a major part of the vulnerable segment everywhere in the world. India has the second largest concentration of tribal population, after that of the African Continent. The total Scheduled Tribe population in India, as per 1991 Census, is about 6.78 crores, which constitute about 8.08 per cent of the total population. In Tamil Nadu, around 40 per cent of the tribal population of the state is concentrated in the Nilgiris district, along with the majority non-tribal population. The tribes, living in the Nilgiris district are Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, Irulas and Paniyas. The Kurumbas, who are living in the Nilgiris district, are considered as Scheduled Tribes in India. The Kurumbas living in areas other than the Nilgiris district are considered as most backward communities, and not as Scheduled Tribes. The encroachment of people from the mainland to forest hills has resulted in a more integrated co-existence of tribals and non-tribals. The British administered this hill for nearly one and a half century. Due to the long association and close contacts of tribes with the Europeans, the tribes of this district were attracted by the European way of living. The Nilgiris, because of its natural charm and pleasant climate, was a place of special attraction for the Britishers. Several border communities acted as a bridge or served as buffer between the tribal and non-tribal societies. So, the conventional characterisation of tribal societies as empirically closed and isolated is ostensibly erroneous and hence does not carry much heuristic value.
Most of the studies on tribals in India seem to have discussed the same set of notions that are to be challenged. The most prominent conclusions of the studies are:

i) tribal communities are isolated and closed entities due to their unique historical and cultural setting,

ii) a historic and static society surviving as cultural lag, and

iii) homogeneous and unstructured units of production and consumption.

Now, there is an increasing realisation that such notions are incongruous with the socio-economic and cultural reality of tribal life in India.

Many of the Kurumba tribes are cultivators or agricultural labourers or engaged in petty trade with a stratified internal social organisation, having a long history of interaction with the State institutions and limited but significant involvement in markets at large. These Kurumba tribes have become a part and parcel of a class society, where, differentiation in terms of occupations, income and wealth should be recognised. Hence, due attention is to be given to these indicators in the analysis of the pace at which they are getting assimilated into the main stream.

Given the context of internal polarisation of the tribal societies, the possibility of an upper stratum benefiting from the socio-economic and political privileges endowed upon the tribals as a whole is more, thus leaving the more backward tribes in a continued state of deprivation. This possibility cannot be ruled out in Kurumba tribes also. This might lead to the widening of an already existing gap between the advanced and backward tribes and also between the rich and poor among the particular tribal population.

Large size sample surveys were conducted by National Sample Survey (NSS) in 1987-88 and 1993-94. State-specific poverty estimates, made by the Planning Commission of India, using NSS surveys, revealed that the percentage of the population below the poverty line declined from 43.8 per cent in 1987-88 to 36.4 per cent in 1993-94 in the...
rural areas of Tamil Nadu. To be more specific in Tamil Nadu, the annual growth rate (1957-1993) of Head count ratio was – 1.88. The percentage decline in the number of poor persons was 0.38. The State's share of total poor in 1993 was 5.10.26 Government spending on rural poor and employment programmes increased substantially in recent years, and this has directly benefited the rural poor.27

A considerable amount of financial input through various tribal welfare schemes has been channelised into the numerous tribal settlements scattering all over Tamil Nadu. It can be argued that most of the tribes in Tamil Nadu have become a part of the major class society. Therefore, it can hardly be cognizable in a separate context, and studying them with ethnographic tools would help only to understand the tribal dynamics in a partial and reductive way. A further comprehension of this dimension requires sophisticated analytical tools from different social science disciplines, particularly economics.

A number of attempts have been made at the national and state levels to estimate the levels of living and inequalities in general, but very few detailed and comprehensive studies have so far been conducted on the levels of living and inequalities among the tribal population at the micro level. A few empirical studies, conducted on the inequalities of tribal areas, provide broad and general information about the existence of inequalities in the distribution of assets, income and household expenditure. These studies do not provide the extent of absolute and relative, as well as sources of inequalities, with a view to find out the target group within the tribal economy itself. Specifically, no detailed economic study was conducted on the levels of living, and inequalities, among Kurumba tribal population in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu State of India.

The above analytical insights are of utmost significance in the particular context of understanding the tribal dynamics in Tamil Nadu. Keeping in view the above facts, the present study aims at understanding the socio-economic conditions of Kurumba tribes with the following objectives:
1.5. Objectives

The overall objective of the study is to understand the levels of living of the Kurumba tribes and to find out the ways for their socio-economic development. The specific objectives are:

i) to study the socio-economic conditions of Kurumbas;

ii) to analyse the pattern of asset holding, income distribution and the extent of inequality of different occupational categories;

iii) to measure the extent of poverty;

iv) to construct the tribal quality life index at household level and to know the discriminating power of each indicator in the index;

v) to examine the size and magnitude of indebtedness, and to probe into the pattern of utilisation of borrowed amount; and

vi) to suggest policy measures to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Kurumba tribes.

1.6. Hypotheses

i) The distribution of income is skewed due to skewed distribution of asset holding.

ii) The non-farm, especially organised sector income is the major source of income inequality.

iii) There is a difference in extent of poverty among different occupational categories.

iv) The size and magnitude of indebtedness vary with different occupational categories, and

v) The pattern of utilisation of borrowed amount varies with different occupational categories.

1.7. Reference Period and Data Sources

The data were collected for a period of one year from 1st June of 1999 to 31st May of 2000. This year was normal and free from abnormal climatic condition. For the purpose of easy reference and to avoid monotony, the year 1999-2000 is mentioned as 1999 throughout the study.
This study is based on primary data, collected from the Kurumba households in selected villages. The detailed description of the survey coverage, sample size is provided in Chapter III. The bulk of secondary data is obtained from government offices and non-governmental organisations. The data on land utilisation, cropping pattern, soil types, rainfall, forest area, livestock, population, literacy rate, occupational structure, etc., were collected from the secondary sources like District Statistical Office, District Agricultural Office and District Forest Office, Udhagamandalam.

1.8. Scope of the Study

The existence of socio-economic inequalities in underdeveloped economies is abysmal. These inequalities are mainly due to low rate of development, which is influenced by economic as well as non-economic factors. The economic inequalities can be attributed to the low rate of gains of development. The latter leads to the inequalities in the distribution of asset, income and consumption and hence causes variations in the standard of living of different sections of society. One such section of society is tribal society. The present study aims to work out the extent of relative as well as absolute inequalities in the tribal economy of the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu. The tribal development programmes were implemented in this area. A new work ethic, development ethos and set of value systems forged to spearhead, energise and mobilise society for management of socio-economic transformation at the grassroot level.

Grassroot level comprises of villages and individuals. Hence, if one refers to planning at grassroot level, it is a development from within (DFW). Development from within has already been advocated as survival strategy. Development from within is the nature of capillary, a 'Trickle-up effect'. Trickle-up effect depends upon the levels of living of the people of the area. Hence, this kind of study will unfold the socio-economic
status of selected tribes who are largely at the grassroot level. The results of this study will go a long way in analysing the socio-economic condition of tribals, identifying the causes for their backwardness and formulating suitable policies for their upliftment.

1.9. Limitations

The present study is the first of its kind in the State of Tamil Nadu with particular reference to Kurumba tribes. Yet, it suffers from the following limitations:

1. The primary data were collected only from the Kurumba tribals, as they constitute more than 80 per cent of the tribals in the Nilgiris district. Hence, comparison between different tribals in terms of levels of living, extent of inequalities, etc., was not attempted.

2. The study analyses the levels of living and inequalities among Kurumba tribals of the Nilgiris district. The topography, climatic conditions, cropping pattern, occupations, sources and levels of income, customs and traditions are different in different tribal areas of Tamil Nadu State. Hence, the results of this study can be generalised to the other parts of the tribal areas in Tamil Nadu, keeping in mind the differences in the above conditions.

3. Accessibility and getting reliable data are the important problems. The use of the definitions of earlier studies of other regions in this region is difficult, as the tribals under study are located in hilly and forest regions. Keeping in mind the above problem, the study is undertaken by adopting operational definitions for concepts and terms used in the study.

4. The researcher is using tabular analysis and statistical tools to arrive at meaningful and socially relevant conclusions. The limitations of these tools are applicable to this study also.

1.10. Plan of the Study

The plan of the study gives the contents of the chapters. The present study consists of six chapters.
The first chapter describes the historical perspectives, demography and socio-economic aspects of Scheduled Tribes in India and Tamil Nadu State. It further contains statement of the problem, objectives, hypotheses and sources of secondary data of the study.

The second chapter deals with review of past studies on poverty, inequality, indebtedness, etc. The definition of various concepts used in this study are also given in this chapter.

The third chapter presents the historical importance, physiography, natural resources, human resources, land utilization, etc., of the study area.

The fourth chapter presents a design of the study that includes the justification of the choice of the study area, sampling design and different statistical tools employed in the study.

The fifth chapter is the core chapter, specifically meant for an analysis and discussion. It consists of five sections. The first section analyses the socio-economic conditions of Kurumba households in the sample villages. The second section examines the economic inequalities among the tribal households. The sources of inequalities were also identified and analysed with the help of decomposition analysis in this section. The level of poverty was estimated and analysed using different poverty estimation methods in the third section. The multi-dimensional tribal quality life index at the household level is constructed and analysed in the fourth section. The break-even analysis was also attempted to relate the poverty line income with tribal quality life index. The last section of this chapter probes into the extent of indebtedness and purpose of utilisation of borrowed amount.

The sixth and concluding chapter summarises the findings and offers suitable policy suggestions.
NOTES


5. See Map.


11. This section is based on the following documents and books:


17. R.C. Verma, *op. cit.*


