CHAPTER VIII

Land and Natural Resources

Development as Dispossession, Inaccess and Alienation

Land and natural resources provide a vital source of food for Adivasis. Besides the material advantages that land provides, it serves as cultural and symbolic capital. Land is not dead matter or a commodity but an organic entity for the Adivasis. The Adivasis in Wayanad refer to land as *poomi thai* (mother earth). They maintain certain trees, sacred groves, burial land and forest as the abode of their gods and revitalise their spiritual ties with the land through rituals surrounding these entities. For Adivasis, land is a habitat, territory, social organisation, economic system, cultural identification and political boundary. However, the government policies in the colonial and post colonial period have affected the Adivasi’s close relationship to land, forests and its resources. The coloniser’s ideology based on private exclusive ownership of land and capitalist development were alien to the Adivasi notions of stewardship and communal ownership of land.

The Indian state continued the colonial policy of private property. Thus the independent Indian state systematically restricted and abolished Adivasi’s collective ownership of the common property resources and access to forests through colonial land laws and capitalist development initiatives (Fernandes 1992, Pathy 1998, Roy Burman nd). The process of alienation was initiated through the creation of individual titles to land and then through the concept of ‘*res nullius*’ (absolute ownership of the state) and ‘*terra nullius*’ 49(literally meaning nobody’s land). Through this, the state legitimised its superior power over people’s domains and alienated Adivasi people from their forests and common property resources. After independence, private ownership was institutionalised and the collective customary ownership of land and land based resources were alienated.

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49 Webster’s dictionary defines ‘terra nullius’ as ‘a territory not annexed by any nation’
by both the state and the private entrepreneurs. At the time of conferment of patta (title deed) to individuals, communities’ customary rights over land and forests were not demarcated. As Rao (1998) highlights, through this process, in a way, not only the land was alienated from the Adivasi people, but also from the state itself.

This chapter discusses the perceptions and experiences of the Paniyas and Kurichias in their relationship with land and their ownership and access to land. The differential experiences of these two communities are related to the nature of ownership and access to land and their land relations. The chapter also examines the state interventions with regard to Adivasi land issues and their responses to these interventions in everyday life. The material and cultural significance attached to land and the centrality of land in the development experience of Paniyas and Kurichias are analysed in detail.

The colonial legal stipulation that all land must have a private owner changed the property rights of the Adivasis in Wayanad. The colonial rule rejected the customary rights of the Adivasis and the dual process of conferring private property right on the jenmis and the spread of British plantations curtailed the Adivasis’ ownership and access rights to agricultural land and common lands (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2007). Bestowing private property right to the jenmis by the colonial government while doing the survey and settlement (commenced in 1886 and completed in 1889) for the systematic collection of revenue had a detrimental effect on the Adivasis (ibid). During this survey, the land registers in Wayanad were rewritten in the name of jenmis and they became the undisputed landowners.

Adivasis’ Relationship and Experiences with Land

It is difficult to separate Adivais relationship with land and its resources from their culture and values. The communal ownership patterns, management and access to land and the social embeddedness inherent in their relationship with land still prevails among the Adivasi communities in Wayanad in one way or the other. It was observed that Adivasis have a different set of values and pattern of relationship to land compared to the dominant societies in Wayanad. Adivasis joint cultivation practices, their protection of kavus, their reverence for their burial lands and their ritual practices around land were all evidence of
another culture which centres on production of life and sustenance rather than commodification of life sustaining resources for economic progress and ‘development’.

*Tharavad based Agriculture*

People from the Kurichia community, especially those who keep close contact with the *tharavads*, continue their paddy cultivation and some of their indigenous cultivation practices, ritual practices and festivals around paddy cultivation.

Vinod, the previous office secretary of *Kurichiya Samudaya Sanghatana*, Mananthavady reported,

> Our indigenous concept of community life and well-being cannot be separated from our culture of cultivation. Agriculture is not a business for us, but it is part of our culture. It is a celebration as well as holy action for us. We do *pooja*, bow down to earth and do the ritual celebration before sowing seed, paddy plucking, planting, reaping etc. *Veliyan* is one of the main paddy seed varieties we use traditionally.

The Kurichias cultivate *Veliyan* as a community activity and use it for their food and they believe that this is sustaining the unity among them. *Veliyan* cultivation, is followed with several ritual celebrations. Eran (72) from Tulsi *tharavad* narrated,

> Before entering the field for paddy cultivation, we as a community come together and talk about our conflicts and grudges and affirm community feelings. We decide the *Muhoortham* (auspicious time) and do our ritual celebrations and prayers. We have a ritual called *Daivam Kanal* (seeing god) before beginning the cultivation. After doing *pooja* and special offering to the deity, the Karanavan and Karanavathy begin the paddy planting and we call it *Vilanatti utsavam* (paddy planting festival).

It was observed that during *daivam kanal*, *muni* or *nekal* (ancestors who are venerated as god) possess the religious functionary who becomes the mediator between humans and *nekal*. The religious functionary goes into a trance when they are fully possessed with the *nekal*. He gives directions to the community and elders about what they need to do for good yield as well as prosperity for the whole year. They give special offerings of bunches of bananas, coconuts etc. as offerings to god and call their relatives and neighbours to celebrate the feast.

Rasa from Chathavary *tharavad* said,

> We do paddy cultivation as a celebration. Our traditional customs and ritual practices are associated with that. We used to invite all people in the neighbourhood for these
occasions and give them a feast with wild meat and fish from the river earlier. All members in the tharavad then join for the work.

All their narrations revealed that paddy cultivation was one of the most important festive times for the Kurichias. Kunjaman from Kurichia tharavad reported,

When we do the cultivation together, we get more strength. We know that we have to keep good relationships to make our cultivation a success. All the members in the tharavad join together for this by completing the work in their own individual fields. The elders initiated the celebration of paddy cultivation. After completing the rituals, the Karanavan and Karanavathy asked permission to sow the seed and they sow it first. The ritual practices continue for paddy transplanting and harvesting.

Many of the Kurichias said that it is not celebrated elaborately nowadays.

Not only paddy, but even vegetable cultivation is a celebration in connection with the ucharal festival. Rasa, a Kurichia woman said,

When we celebrate the ucharal festival, we do vegetable cultivation. Even the old people become so interested in cultivation. Earlier, if there were 15 acres of land we counted the members in the family and cultivated according to our need. We used only cow dung as manure. Like a competition we conduct the vegetable cultivation to increase the team spirit.

While the men and women participated equally in the paddy cultivation, women are very enthusiastic about vegetable cultivation. The older women are very interested in vegetable cultivation even today and some of them claimed that they produce all the vegetables they need for the house. As part of their old tradition, they produced cucumber and pumkin. Today they cultivate other vegetables like tomato, ladies finger, spinach, beans etc. in their paddy fields. This became a real help for them as the vegetables they buy from outside could not be trusted because of the use of pesticides. Even now, they continue the practice of vegetable cultivation and this gives them better food security compared to the Paniya community.

The institution of tharavad organised the joint cultivation of paddy and it increased the bondedness among the tharavad members. The spirituality and community values of the Kurichias are interwoven in their cultivation practices. They are owners of paddy fields, workers and consumers of the produce and they celebrate their cultivation as a community.
Paniyas’ Access to Paddy Fields

The Paniyas were experts in working in the paddy fields. According to the oral traditions of Aivu (the code and conduct of the daily life of the Kuruman community) when Kurumas were owners of land, the Paniyas were given control over the paddy fields and the Kurumas accepted Paniyas’ rights in the agricultural activities even though they observed pollution taboos (Kjosavic and Shanmugharatnam 2007). Paddy cultivation was ingrained in the Paniya culture too and they report that even their rhythmic dance movements and folk songs have deep links with paddy cultivation. Paniya diet practices were also related to the flora and fauna of the paddy fields.

The Paniyas’ knowledge and skill for paddy cultivation was widely used in Wayanad by the non-Adivasis. As Paniyas were not owners of paddy fields, historically their cultural celebrations around paddy cultivation was used by their non-Adivasi employers to exploit them as they do double amount of work when it is integrated with their cultural dance and music.

Kavu (sacred groves) and Adivasis

Many of the Kurichia tharavads maintained kavus on their land. Nuclear families who have no connection with the tharavad could not preserve their kavus and culture of reverence to nature very strictly. Eran from Tulsi tharavad said,

We consider Kavu the abode of our gods. We will not unnecessarily step into it or cut a tree, creepers or bush from it for any purpose. We keep it in its wild form. On Tulam 10 (Malayalam month) when we do our ritual Nayattu (hunting) we enter the kavu. The forest department promised money to protect it. They kept boards to take the credit. But they discontinued the support and we told them we are going to remove the board. They asked us to keep it as it was already installed, but we removed it.

While seeing another kavu which is maintained by the forest department I asked them why it is not maintained like their original kavus in other tharavads. One Kurichian responded, when jendas (cement stones that demarcate the boundary of the forest) are made people are kept out from its maintenance. The two kavus, one maintained by Kurichias and the other in the forest maintained by the forest department provides the contrasting behavior towards the kavus (photo 29 &30).
Promising money to maintain and keep the board by the forest department can be seen as an effort to take the credit of the self preserved forests of Adivasis. But Kurichia people recognised it and they removed the department’s board when they stopped giving money for its maintenance. However, the State continues to play a decisive role in the future of their ‘living places’ in manifold ways beginning from the reservation of forest, taking away the usufruct rights of the Adivasi people and through new initiatives like, treating *kavu*-their sacred spaces as ‘administrative spaces’.

When the Paniyas lost their sacred groves with the erosion of their common lands, they maintained at least a tree symbolically as their *kavu* and did the rituals under that during their festivals and life cycle rituals. In the study area wherever they had a small plot of land, the Paniyas were particular that they maintained a *kavu*. In the Muthanga land struggle they took the tree as a symbol of their last ‘frontier’, last space to connect themselves with earth and venerate. There it became not only a cultural and spiritual symbol but a political symbol to reacquire their lost land and autonomy. However, even after religious mainstreaming for many years, Adivasis relate the trees and forest to their gods and their spirituality revolves around the subjective experiences of human and non human world and their ancestral spirits.

A spirituality of Shamanism is observed among Kurichias and Paniyas even today where the godman in a trance proclaims the experiential knowledge and wisdom as revelations from god for the well being of the community (photos 12 and 13). One Kurichia elder boastfully said that our *nekal* (ancestral spirit medium) is seeing god and out of that experience they talk unlike the non-Adivasis who just memorise and venerate god. Thus, their experience of god is a subjective experience more than objectifying god as a separate entity. As Surralles and Hierro (2005) point out god become a knowing subject rather than a certain ideal of knowledge which stays outside the human. They also observe that this shamanic god experience of the Adivasis holds a different epistemology opposing the Western objectivist epistemologies. The Adivasis always stress a rigourous preparation from their godman to enter into this non human experience, to make explicit or personifying the qualities of the subject they are representing to an ideal minimum. Also many of their elders expressed that their younger generation lack rigour in
observances of their tradition and the diminishing spirit in personifying god due to the modern ideas of religion and spirituality.

Adivasi narrations revealed that their spirituality is cosmo-centric and the commercial and capitalist values are opposite. Modern society seeks to protect nature with an anthropocentric vision, but Adivasis have a holistic vision and nature and human beings, non humans and god, are related to each other in their everyday life. Their narration of stories depicts that non humans and their actions are equivalent to a human being’s action having the same consciousness and common sense. Their narrations of stories as well as their real life situations represent the mythical realm of the union of the human and the non human world. Thus, land, nature, animals, and even their gods become an extension of themselves, and they are different from things/objects. Surralles and Hierro (2005) highlight the contrast by pointing out that in modern science, knowledge is obtained through objectification but in shamanism every thing is subjective and it is through subjectification that knowledge is acquired. When Adivasis say that our culture is not reflected in the state’s development plans, they mean that their subjectifying epistemologies are missing and that the mythical union they experience with nature and the non human world is missing in the Western developmental models of the state.

Loss of Burial Lands

The Paniyas see their burial lands as the resting place of their ancestor gods. All of the Paniya colonies selected for study reported their loss of burial land or recent encroachment. They reported stories of capturing back some of the remaining patches through resistance. The Paniya community fought for their burial lands and reacquired it in two colonies in the study area. The cultural and spiritual significance they attribute to their burial lands united the community to fight back together.

Today, in most of the Paniya colonies in the study area, people have no land of their own or common lands, but in three of the selected settlements, they have a piece of common land left for burying their dead and in one settlement, they bury their dead in the forest. Non-Adivasi people’s greed for land extended even to these small patches of burial land that the Paniyas kept very dearly. In Kunnil colony, they were so upset while talking about the loss of their burial land, that they mentioned that the village adhikari took the
side of the Jenmis and the land which was used by the Paniyas were given in favour of the jenmi. Chantha recollected the past and said,

While our Mooppan was ploughing, the adhikari (village officer) and Vellambady Swamy (land lord) came and took his thumb impression on a white paper. They said, they will give record for our vachanasthalam (burial ground). But later we came to know that the land was sold by the jenmi to a nattukaran (migrant). We do not know what was written on the paper. But when the non-Adivasi people occupied the land, we realised that we had lost it.

Paniya elders shared that in some colonies, since there was no common land for burial, they had to take the dead bodies of their old people to the nearby forest for burial. They had a ritual for their dead ones giving them to the Theyyakkavu or Koolikkavu. According to their belief, if they did not perform the death rituals, they feared that evil forces would do harm to the family and the community. During Kakkappola, the spirit medium (Attaly) fasts and he gets possessed and conducts the ritual services to give peace and rest to the dead person’s spirit. Attaly in a trance removes the evil spirits through dramatic physical manifestations like shaking of the body, falling down to the ground and producing voices of the evil spirit to merge the spirits into their ancestral world of spirits. By performing the rituals without failure, the family of the dead person and his community receive blessings through the ancestral spirit.

The three day long rituals give the community conviction for a new life, having been relieved of grief from loss and fear of evil forces. Except one, the other three Paniya colonies in the study area have their burial lands away from their colony or in the nearby forest. They reported that their ritual practices are losing rigour due to lack of burial grounds in the vicinity. It is observed that if they had land and enough facility in the colony, they perform rituals very rigourously but if the burial land is in the forest, the rituals are cut down and the participation becomes low. Their relationship with the burial land was linked to their relationship with their ancestors and thus the loss of burial land alienated them from their cultural beliefs. Even now they hold onto ancestor worship despite their close interaction with non-Adivasis. The Paniyan community fought for their burial lands and reacquired it in two colonies in the study area.

Thanan Mooppan (70) from Valli colony described how they protected their burial land at Vemom. He reported,
When I was small, the non-Adivasi people encroached into the common lands we used at Vemom. There we had one and half acre burial land. Non-Adivasi people started encroaching that and now we have only half acre left. Again when non-Adivasi people started encroaching, we (30 to 40 Paniya people in Valliyoorakavu) joined together and created a fence using bamboo thorns. We also had applied to the Panchayat and Block to get funds for building a wall so that we could make sure that non-Adivasi people would not encroach it again.

Thanan Mooppan from Valli Colony said that they blindly believed that nobody would encroach into their burial land and kept it without a fence. He was glad that the CPI (M) supported them by encouraging them to reacquire at least the remaining area. In Chathavari, the Oorumoooppan who had earlier histories of fighting for land stated that they insisted and managed to get funds from the Panchayat to make a wall around their burial land when one Christian family started encroaching on it to make a road to their paddy fields.

The Kurichiyas also face conflict regarding their burial lands, from within the tharavad. For instance, in Tulsi tharavad, the former Karanavar gave ten acres to marumakan (nephew) and suggested that two acres should be kept common as burial land for the entire tharavad. As there was no official record for that two acres he has now started cultivating that land keeping only ten cents for burial and there is dispute and negotiation among the tharavad members to keep two acres exclusively as burial land before the partition. There was no issue about the burial land before the partition.

The loss of burial land is a major concern for them. “Where will we bury our dead?” becomes a resonating phrase as their small patches they kept as burial ground – the resting ground for their ancestors is also being encroached by the land hungry people in Wayand and the mobilisation against this is a cultural and political assertion widespread in most of the Paniya settlements in the study area. The last common lands left for the Paniya community is their burial lands and even on that, the non-Adivasi community continues its encroachment.

**Loss of Access to Common Lands**

The resource base and livelihood systems of the Adivasi people are generally founded on common property rights and forest resources. In Wayanad, common property rights were not established on an institutional basis. As Varghese (1970) points out during British rule, the policy of considering jenmis as the sole owners of the landed properties were institutionalised by assuming janmam right of theirs on landed property. Later, however, British writers

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50 Janmam or jemm right gives the proprietor absolute right to property and he can alienate or oust all other occupants at any time if they make any attempt to convert it for any profitable account (Varghese1970).
themselves acknowledged that declaring the entire landed property including wasteland asjenmam right was imprudent (ibid). He again points out that during the British rule, a large area of Wayanad taluk was converted into a new holding called government janmam to establish the state’s superior right over landed property. Kunhaman (1989) points out that during the second, third and fourth decades of the 20th century, large scale immigration of non-Adivasis from Travancore and Cochin into the Wayanad region happened and they purchased land from the jennis. The migration during different historical instances resulted in the transition of the Adivasi economy of subsistence into a market economy.

The Paniyas and Kurichias reported that the areas they used as common property until three or four decades ago is in private ownership or government ownership now. Paniyas being a slave caste in the feudal, colonial and early independent periods accessed the common resources for their survival other than the daily pittance they received from their masters. From the narrations of the Paniyas, it was evident that there were plenty of common lands and forests accessible to them for collecting materials for their daily use, ritual performance, burial etc. even though the land was under the jennis. There was plenty of land available till the influx of large scale migration into Wayanad.

During the feudal period, the Paniyas were living at the fringes of the jennis land in small temporary huts. When the Paniya community recounted about their slave labour, they said that life is better now as they get wages for their labour and they are not beaten or threatened to go for work. At the same time, they recollected that even though the jennis did not allow Paniyas to cultivate their land on a long term basis, their daily needs were met from the common lands around them and that they used to cultivate banana, tapioca etc. in small patches for their use.

Members of the Paniya community stated that in the past (they meant feudal, colonial and early independent periods), land ownership was not a dire need for their survival. Chantha (85) narrates,

When we were working under the jennis, we had everything on this hill. If we went for a walk in the morning we could collect everything for the day. Where we are staying now was a njaval thottam (black jamun garden) before. We used to eat all kinds of fruits to fill our stomach during our childhood. We had roots and leafy vegetables in plenty. Those days we never bought soap to wash our clothes and for our bath. We had Cheengakkaya (soap nut seeds) on this hill. We had enough medicinal plants to treat our common illness. Now everything is destroyed and there is not a piece of land, which is common. Every inch is occupied by ‘others’ (non-Adivasis) around.

This indicates the subsistence of Adivasis built around the common lands even during the time of jennis. The Paniyas treated natural resources of the hills and forests as
common property resources. For their survival needs, they collected the natural resources around them and shared it among themselves. When the Paniya community shared their views about the nature around them, they described the nostalgic plentiful past forgetting the hardships that they had undergone during slavery. This indicates that the land, the whole ecological system or the nature around them was much more supportive for their livelihood in the past than in the present. According to Jacob (2006), the erstwhile feudal chiefs did not block their traditional rights in the forest and they were comparatively free in accessing food materials from the vast areas of land around them till it became private property.

The environmental degradation and restrictions to enter the land which are in private ownership and the non-availability of common lands is related to Adivasi marginalisation. Kunhaman (1989) points out that till the middle of the 17th century, Wayanad was inhabited exclusively by hill-tribes. The Kurichias and Kurumas were predominant among them and they were at the stage of slash and burn agriculture and their social organisation had the characteristic of primitive communism where class contradictions were non-existent (*ibid*).

However, as Chantha (85) mentioned, there was no scarcity of land and forest in Wayanad for their common use or for gathering, burial grounds, sacred groves etc. during her younger days. Further, from the narratives of Lampan (45) from Kunnil Paniya colony, it appears that the restriction to access land and its resources increased in the modern period. He said,

In olden times, we had to fear only our Jenmis who stayed far away from us, but today we fear each and every one around us. During the Jenmi’s time there were vast areas of common land and we used to enter freely, collect food materials and fuel wood and fodder and used vast areas as burial grounds without restriction. However, today if we want to put our foot on another person’s property we have to take permission. The non-Adivasi people do not give us permission to collect firewood or cut grass from their fields. We cannot even collect leafy vegetables, which we see as the only alternative when we are not able to buy food items from the market. They say that their banana plants and ginger cultivation gets destroyed if we enter.

Lampan’s description may sound as though they are hiding the hard realities of slavery while criticising capitalist development. It is true that he distilled the history to criticise capitalist development. However, there are facts which control their mobility more than during the slave period as their access to common land was blocked when it became
private property owned by non-Adivasis. The alienation of common lands and natural resources from Adivasis was almost complete during the land reform period as *jenmis* started selling their surplus land, (which was used by Paniyas), to non-Adivasis and when the state captured the uncultivated surplus land from the *jenmis* for redistribution to the landless. As Agarwal (1992) points out, the availability of natural resources to the poor is eroded due to its degradation in quantity and quality and the increasing ownership of the state and privatisation of common property resources.

Lampan (45) from Kunnil colony expressed his anger towards private property and narrated another experience. When their *Jenmi* Velmurukan swamy sold his property to a Christian convent, they fenced it with barbed wires. They fenced Lampan’s land also with barbed wire which fell along the border of their land and the two spaces were divided by a small footpath. Lampan was not there when sisters from the convent constructed barbed wires on the land that he had acquired from his *jenmi*. When Lampan came back, he removed the barbed wires from his land. The sisters in the convent called the police to frighten him. However, the police could not do anything as the barbed wire fencing was on Lampan’s land and he had the right to remove it.

The sisters then put up iron fencing around Lampan’s land which falls near their boundary. However, Lampan perceived it as a double protection for their ‘private property’ and mentioned that non-Adivasis usually suspected Adivasis first if something was stolen from their land. However, the barbed wire fencing blocked the Paniyas’ free movement to the field and the stream close by. These spaces were accessed by them easily for taking a bath, washing clothes, collecting leaves, crabs, catching fish, fetching sand for repairing their houses etc. Lampan’s action of throwing the barbed wires was an expression of the Paniyas’ anger towards the concept of exclusive right on property and the blocking of their easy access to the *thodu*.

In a group discussion, the Paniyas reported that their life was thoroughly affected by the capturing of their common lands by the state and others and it became one of the most important reasons for their marginalisation and they became “thieves” when they entered the common lands which they had been using over the years. One non-Adivasi from Edavaka panchayat asked, “If Paniya people are given land what is the use? It will remain unproductive”. According to him, the British rule introduced the concept of private
property and made land productive by raising plantations in the waste land. Similarly, the state perceived the lands they used for subsistence as wastelands as they were not used for cash crop cultivation and the income generated was negligible, but for the Adivasi people in Wayanad, it was the land for subsistence, the resource for their everyday life. In the local context, it resulted in the indebtedness of the Paniyas to the local merchants and increased their control over the Paniya community in manifold ways.

Earlier, the Kurichia community lived near the forests, in scattered homesteads- each a self-contained unit with its own hills and fields (Menon 1996). They settled as joint families and to feed all family members, they had to cultivate large tracts on a long term basis. They used the land and forest around them as common property and enjoyed customary rights over it as a community. The Kurichia elders said that they used to cultivate large areas of forests for their subsistence. Their subsistence cultivation practices like punam (slash and burn) cultivation was stopped due to lack of common lands and forest lands. The loss of pastoral land and the decline of grazing and fallow land affected the Kurichias severely. The number of cattle slowly declined and the manure to the paddy field also reduced and the yield became less. Tulsi tharavad reported that they had around 175 cattle and slowly they were sold or got extinct due to lack of pastoral lands. This increased their dependency on the market for cattle food as well as for manure. However, they were forced to change to cash crop cultivation. The Kurichias used all their paddy fields for rice cultivation but in recent years, small patches are used for banana which they cultivated earlier at the forest fringes and other cultivable common lands. The forest used to be another habitat for them and they were hunters. When hunting was prohibited, they could not even perform their ritual hunting on Tulam 10 (Malayalam month in October). However, there were tharavads in interior places who still conduct this ritual hunt after taking permission from the forest officials (photo 31).

The Paniyas as well as the Kurichiyas lost their common property resources in many ways. Polanyi’s (1964) analysis of the ‘enclosures’ in Britain and how it deprived the means of life of the poor peasants and their heirs, helps us to understand the plight of Paniya and Kurichia people today. He calls this enclosure movement as the ‘revolution of the rich against the poor’. He points out that the lords and nobles broke down ancient laws and customs by means of violence at the price of social disorder. The conversion of
Adivasis’ living places to private enclaves and state administrative spaces is similar to the ‘enclosure movement’ or in Marx’s terms, ‘primitive accumulation’ but not perceived as an injustice generally.

Further, Therakam (2009), in his study on socially denied and legally sanctioned rights of Adivasi people in Wayanad, argues that interpretation of customary laws of Adivasis may be brought before courts so that it can be applied by courts wherever it is necessary. Kujur (2010) points out that the Constitution of India has given a mandate for the cultural rights of the Scheduled Tribes under Article 13 to treat customary law at par with other branches of the civil law. Article 13 (2) has the provision that the state shall not make any law, which takes away or abridges the rights conferred in this article and any law made in breaking of this clause shall be void. So he argues that the customary rights have the force of law and can be taken as judicial notice by the courts under section 57 of Indian Evidence Act, 1872. In Wayanad, the customary laws are not included in the civil law and the court has no knowledge about the customary laws of Adivasis (Therakam 2009).

When their relationship to land was threatened, Adivasis material and cultural survival became difficult and there were incidents of resistance and fights for land in their day to day life. Taking away of the revenue land by non-Adivasi land owners and state is reported by the Paniyas and the Kurichias and there were rare voices of dissent despite the fact that they were not familiar with the land laws.

Among the Kurichias there was internal strife during the transition from joint property to individual property.

Naran from Chathavary tharavad narrated,

There are also incidents like the educated members among us trying to get private ownership of land by influencing the village adhikaris when power shifted from Karanavar to the local panchayat authorities and tribal administrators. As a result many of our tharavad members abandoned ties with the tharavad and their collective existence around the Karanavar, and became more individualistic.

Naran, firmly believed and insisted that officers have to negotiate with the Kurichia community to solve the land disputes among them. Now that power has been taken away from the community and given to other entities like political parties, administrators and
village officers the unity among them has shattered, he maintained. This has resulted in internal strife among the tharavad members regarding division of property.

In Kurichia tharavads, where the property division is not settled by consensus, there is still strife among the members. One Karanavan expressed his discontent with the local panchayat who sanctioned money under a housing scheme for the Adivasis to individual members without negotiating with the tharavad Karanavan when the property is not divided among the members. He suggested that instead of planning from above, the officials have to come down, sit with them and plan if they are really concerned about their issues. He also believed that only Adivasi officers can understand their issues and others cannot understand their culture. Even though the government has ensured the participation of Adivasis through oorukootams in the formulation and implementation of schemes related to them, the processes in the local context reveal that it has not materialised even now and the Kurichias as well as Paniyas are not able to participate in these negotiations.

While attending an adalat held by the SC/ST Commission on 16/3/2010 at Mananthavady for resolving Adivasis complaints, Kurichia nuclear families (outside the selected settlements) reported different issues regarding land. Sharavanan from the Kurichia community complained that he did not get patta for the land which he was using from 1969 onwards. The commission promised that they would study the details and within 45 days they would find a solution for the issue after contacting the concerned authorities. Sharavanan said he had been approaching the village officers since 1969 to settle this issue, but the village officer was indifferent. With the SC/ST commission’s involvement, the village officer enquired and found that for his three acres of land, the patta was permitted before, but since they did not pay the vrikshavila, it had lapsed. Village administration claimed that there were 44 trees and now they have to pay for those trees to get patta for their 3 acres they were using since 1969. He mentioned that they are three siblings and if they get patta for that, each one will get one acre as promised by the government. Annan’s father said that there were only around 20 trees that he could remember and they had been destroyed in a fire. The dried trees got decayed or were used as firewood, and now there were only four trees. After almost six months, the concerned authorities called another adalat at Kalpetta and informed Annan that he
had to pay Rs. 66,000 to receive the \textit{patta}. Annan informed that they did not have money to pay and asked for a reduction to an affordable amount. He asked,

Isn’t it injustice, not giving \textit{patta} in the name of non payment of \textit{vrikshavila}. And after complaining to the SC/ST commission, the village officer came and harassed me saying “You cut the trees and sold it. We can take action against you. It is better to withdraw from this case...you will not get this land anyway”. I told them that we were using this land since 1969 and I did not mind proceeding with the complaint despite action taken against him.

Also, there were complaints related to occupying their traditional land by the forest department. Velu, a Kurichia who was using the land near the forest from 1970 onwards claimed that he paid tax for more than ten years and had the receipts for that. He complained that the village officer was not taking the tax after that, saying that it is forest land. In the \textit{adalat}, the village officer said that there was conflict existing between forest land and private land and so it was not possible to give \textit{patta} for Velu’s land. (I could follow up these two cases only till March 2011). It appears that even with the involvement of the SC/ST commission, Adivasis are unable to acquire \textit{patta} for their land or resolve the dispute on ownership.

Even though, being slaves Paniyas not inherited any land, the Paniya colonies in the study area recounted that a Mooppan who resided in their colony had a piece of land with record. The Mooppan or his successor holding the record said that \textit{jenni} had helped to get him land. To ensure the supply of labour to the \textit{jennis} and the landed class around, they have given half or one acre of land to a Mooppan to form a Paniya colony around as a labour force. When all the surplus land was taken away by the government, \textit{jennis} acted very cleverly and retained a Paniya colony at the fringes of their land by assigning land to one faithful Mooppan. If land was not given even to one person when surplus land was taken away by the government, they could have gone back to the forests to earn their living and that was prevented by giving land to one Mooppan who was a faithful slave to the \textit{jenni}.

Other than this there were rare cases among Paniyas who fought with the \textit{jenni} to acquire a piece of land they were using. Chantha narrated,

The \textit{Jenni} started selling the last piece of land left for us without offering any security to us. During the night my son and I made a mud wall around the piece of land we lived and cultivated for our sustenance. One \textit{sakhavu} (active CPI (M) member) from the communist party supported us to escape from police atrocity for capturing the land even though the
jenmi filed a case against us in the police station. When the police came they asked us ‘why have you taken only 40 cents? You could have taken at least two acres of land’.

In another case in Thirunelli Panchayat, the land on which a Paniya Mooppan’s house was situated was revenue land according to his understanding. However, the Chetty, (the former jenmi) threatened the Adivasi people saying that it was his land. Ellan Mooppan took courage and started building a house on a small plot. This angered Chetty who verbally abused him. However, Mooppan was very courageous and he mentioned:

Holding the pick axe in my hand I told the Chetty not to approach me. Chetty went back without fighting. But nobody else in the colony is courageous enough to challenge the Chetty and build a house again in the remaining revenue land.

Ellan Mooppan is one exception who could fight alone with the Chetty and his resistance bore fruit. He showed the nearby land and said these are all rouny land (for revenue land he used the word rouny land) and with support from the officials, it is all in Chetty’s name today. According to a newspaper report (Mangalam, 6 December 2006), the village in Thirunelli Panchayat, office unlawfully accepted tax for 50 acres of revenue land from an estate owner under the order of a higher official. The estate measured 165 acres and with that the estate owner occupied 50 acres of revenue land and was paying tax for that land too. When it was divided among the owners and they came to pay the tax, the village officer found out the mistake.

Even now the Paniya people in that colony are hesitant to go and clarify their land details with the village office and revenue department. The inability to negotiate and fear in approaching officials still prevails among majority of the Paniyas. During my pilot visit in 2007, in Arayal colony, Kunjan’s family had 5 cents of land around his house and they took permission from the Chetty to plant tapioca in that land. Kunjan’s wife said, “It is unfair that we had to ask permission from the Chetty to cultivate in the land we used from our ancestors time”.

However, today they are cautious about the non-Adivasis’ tendency to appropriate even their meagre land holdings around their hut. For instance, Nellan (35) from Kunnil Paniya community said:

When a non-Adivasi started digging at the boundary of the small plot of land we have, I told her we will complain to the police. But my people have no record even for the small patches they hold and so they are exploited even today.
Other than these external quarrels, the Paniyas’ lack of land and lack of access to common lands are causing struggles within their community. Adivasi leader C.K Janu said that lack of land caused petty quarrels among Paniyas because if they chewed tobacco and spat, it may reach the veranda of their neighbours house due to lack of space.

Studies show that the Adivasis have continuously been deprived of their land by vested interests, money lenders and particularly by those who have settled in Adivasi areas (Cheria et.al 1997, Kjosavic and Shanmugatatnam 2007). Benami transfers, the transfer of land from Adivasis to non-Adivasis in the form of lease and mortgage and encroachment due to lack of land records were very common. Projects related involuntary displacement, seasonal and long-term migration were other important factors for land alienation (Cheria et.al 1997).

In the core areas of study, it was observed that the Kurichia community fared better in protecting their lands as they had a comparatively better relationship with the jenmis, village authorities and migrants compared to the Paniya community and managed to get records for the land they were using for cultivation. Even though the land transfers among Adivasis and non-Adivasis are strictly prohibited in Kerala, it continued through illegal measures and the village authorities were found to be indifferent to Adivasi land alienation. Thus, the concept of private property, non-Adivasi greed, and the nexus among non- Adivasis and officers are all reasons for Adivasis land alienation and loss of their common lands they accessed earlier. The following section discusses Adivasi women’s experience around land alienation lack of access to common lands and forests.

**Private Property, Material Alienation and Experiences of Women**

The exclusive rights on land as private property and the intrusion into the market economy for subsistence changed the reality of the Adivasis drastically. The jenmis, migrants, money lenders, business people, and forest department made use of Adivasis’ ignorance of different land laws which are imposed on them by the state and it accelerated the process of alienation. Adivasi women are the worst victims of the exploitation of life sustaining resources as they assume more responsibility to collect food items, firewood, water etc. and feed the family. Ammini (35) from Kunnil Paniya colony stated,
Before the arrival of migrants we had vast areas of land and we fetched food and other resources from there. Now we have to depend entirely on money. For everything we have to depend on others. There is nothing left for us. If we had land we could collect firewood, fodder, leafy vegetables and food items from there… the common lands we used to cultivate paddy, chama, muthari, thena, cholam, banana, tapioca etc. are no more there and the places where we used to dig for edible roots were converted for construction purpose or for thottam (cash crop garden).

From the narrations of Paniya women, it was clear that the common property resources and the natures’ wealth they made use of for their subsistence has vanished today due to the concept of private property and modern development. Women are predominantly responsible for the food needs of the family even today. Whenever Paniya women are asked about their problems, they immediately plunge into lack of water, firewood and food materials. All their common land became cash crop plantations and private property. The Paniya community were landless and their women suffer more than Kurichias who own at least a patch of land. Agarwal (1994) points out that land occupies a special place as a productive asset and the possession of a small plot of land, unless totally barren, can reduce the risk of poverty and improve the status of women.

When all the common property resources were alienated from the Paniyan community, they were left without any base for their everyday survival. Urha, a Paniya woman stated that non-tribal neighbors will not allow them to fetch firewood from their land, saying that it is manure for their plants. She affirmed,

We may take firewood from ‘others’ land without their notice as they do not allow it if they see us. They may call us thieves, but we are not thieves. We take only the fruits of the earth and do not loot gold or money like the non-tribal people. All our common lands and forests are taken away by others. Where will we go for firewood and leafy vegetables?

In this life world narrative, she unravels the manifold marginalisation of her community by the state and non- Adivasi people. The State engaged in structural violence by capturing all common lands by including it in the criteria of no man’s land or government janmam. Similarly, non-Adivasis also engage in everyday violence by ousting Adivasis if they try to enter private lands, which were once common property. She rises above the state laws in challenging the stereotypes and historical injustice meted out to them. While showing the fences created around private property, she cherished the past memories of using common lands and paddy fields for their daily needs even during the times of slavery.
The introduction of private ownership of land by the colonial state and its continuation and appropriation of land by the modern state has far reaching implications in gender relations especially in Adivasi societies. Lack of access to natural resources increased the work load of the Paniyas as well as Kurichias. According to Agarwal (1992), the state control over forests and village commons and privatisation of communal resources has far reaching effects on traditional resource use and management and in the status of Adivasi women. She highlights that the traditional systems of water management, methods of gathering firewood and fodder and practices of shifting agriculture were not destructive for nature and it lessened the work load of Adivasi women. The loss of natural resources and environmental degradation affected Paniya women more than Kurichia women and it had class and gender implications as well. In the case of Paniyas, the resource for livelihood was destroyed totally, and their economic dependence on men increased, and the special status enjoyed by them at home is also diminishing.

Land conflicts with the jenmis also led to the exploitation of Paniya women. The Paniyas were hesitant to fight with the jenmis for the land they were traditionally using for their subsistence fearing that their girl children would be sexually exploited. Nima, a Paniya woman from Kunnil colony narrated her relative’s earlier experience with their Jenmi:

One girl was used by the jenmi and when she became pregnant they killed her and left her in their pathayappura (paddy store room). They did this as her brother had kept a plot of the Jenmi’s land. Parents having girl children were all the more fearful to keep any land for themselves, since they feared for their daughter’s safety.

It emerges that their worst sufferings were related to their loss of land and exploitation of women. Paniya leaders share these experiences through songs and narratives while gathering for protest meetings to discuss their land issues. For instance, in a Paniya conference51 a Paniya leader Prabhath from Cheengeri sang,

Theyyame kaithozhincho... Enkale Kakkename...
Enkala Nadum poya...Enkala Kadum Poya...
Enkala Mannum poya...Enkala Pennum Poya...

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51 Paniya conference, conducted in Bathery, Wayanad from March 13-15, 2010 supported by the Centre for Development Studies and University of Montreal.
(We adore you god, protect us god, we lost our nadu (habitat), we lost our forest, we lost our soil, we lost our women).

Other than extreme forms of violence, Paniya women met with demeaning constructions due to their landlessness and dependence. In Arayal Paniya settlement in Thirunelli Panchayat, they do not have a small yard to perform their ritual celebrations and dances and during one marriage celebration, their women danced on the road. As a consequence, the non-Adivasi as well as the Kurichia community depicted them as **shameless** women and depicted their lack of discipline as the reason for the presence of unwed mothers in that settlement. In the selected settlements, the Kurichias did not report sexual exploitation from non-Adivasis. According to Kuricha’s narratives, their landedness, matrilineal joint families and their history as warriors gave their women more security from non-Adivasis. The non-Adivasis construct Kurichia women as having **adyathwam** (of high social rank, aristocratic and cultured) connecting them with their **tharavad** property and their ‘decent’ behaviour. The concept of public patriarchy (Walby 1990) helps understand the differential status of Kurichia and Paniya women in the larger society and how the non-Adivasis patriarchal notions create a clear divide between them.

As the matrilineal system existed among the Kurichias, women were secure in their community. In matrilineal kinship, a Kurichian identifies oneself throughout one’s life with the matrilineage and the **mittom** of one’s mother’s natality. Transmission of property through women confers better security to them even though the ownership is bestowed upon the maternal uncle who becomes the **Karanavan** of the **tharavad**. However, they reported that unlike the other communities, Kurichia men rarely wreak physical harassment on their women or ask for dowry during marriage. Their widows and divorced women can come back to their **tharavad** at any time as they have a right in the **tharavad** property. Giving maximum protection and security to their **kunjoottikal** (women folk in the **tharavad**) is considered as a factor that adds honour to the **Karanavan** and it is a prerequisite for venerating them as **Munis** (ancestral gods).

However, the matrilineal system did not give equal status to women in Kuricha **tharavads**. As Kelkar and Nathan (1991) points out, in Kuricha community the marriage was not based on the sexual attraction of a boy and girl, but the boy’s father looked for a healthy and strong daughter-in-law to perform household labour as well as labour in the field. Thus women’s productive and reproductive power and her use value was the main
criteria for selecting a woman for marriage and this reveals how women become objects of exchange. As Kelkar and Nathan observe, when land was not scarce for cultivation, the labour power was the main source to be monopolised for control.

First of all, women’s development should cater to their livelihood requirements, which demands that women have control over land and its resources. However, Kurichia matriliny did not bestow women with equal status and freedom and control over property. The Karanavar in tharavad and husbands in nuclear families had control over property and greater responsibility for the financial maintenance of the family, while the female partners were more bound to household work. Women do not seem to participate in important discussions and decision making and they themselves perceive their role subordinate to their husbands and brothers. With regard to customs and taboos related to the Kurichia tradition, there are restrictions on women. The purity/pollution rituals are practised very strictly among the Kurichias especially in tharavads. The socialisation of Kurichia women is in accordance with patriarchal values and restricted through a powerful hierarchy between men and women in their every day lives. Thus, the special security offered in a tharavad for women and the control over women, helped protect their community as well as their tharavad property from disintegration. As Lindberg (2001) observes, the more the property involved the more the restrictions on a women’s sexuality, and this was true in the case of Kurichia women in tharavad. However, the girl preference and special care for women went along with this control in the Kurichia tharavad and the interest was mainly the landed property which descent through mothers’ lineage. For instance, Eran from Tulsi tharavad stated,

In earlier times, we liked our girl children more as the tharavad and material resources were inherited through her. Now when the matrilineal system and joint families are not fully functional in the traditional way, our preference for girl is also disappearing.

When the matrilineal system is undergoing transition and the tharavads are changed to nuclear families, the preference for girls and the strong observance of purity pollution rituals and control over women are reducing in the Kurichia community. However, the Kurichias in their nuclear families reported the emergence of the dowry system due to the influence of modernity and division of property.
In the Kurichia nuclear families, it was observed that those women who owned a piece of land demonstrated better participation in the decision making process than those who did not have any land title. For instance, in Champa Kurichia nuclear family, the property is in the name of Maani (wife of Nippan) and she was found to be very outspoken with visitors, and also sat with her husband for all decision making processes of the household. Supporting this phenomenon, Agarwal (1994) argues, “The gender ideologies and associated practices are culturally specific, historically variable and dialectically linked to property ownership and control”.

Nathan (1997) traces the dominant position in the hierarchy by men primarily to the formation of state and the establishment of individual property. The state had contributed to the growing gender division among the Adivasis. For instance, when the government gave record for land to a few Adivasis in the earlier times, it was registered exclusively in the name of men. Only after the death of their husband, did women inherit this land. Xaxa (2004) argues that the development pursued by the Indian state in the post independent era has accelerated and intensified the gender disparity among the Adivasi people. However, according to the agreement with the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (AGMS)52 in Kerala, the recently distributed lands were given in the names of both women and men.

**Land Issues of Adivasis and the State**

Against the backdrop of the Adivasis’ relationship with land discussed in the first section, this section delineates state and its capitalist development processes to understand the material condition of the Adivasis. Before discussing the state policies and interventions to distribute land to the Adivasis, the land ownership patterns of Adivasis and their issues related to landholdings are briefly discussed.

A Kurichia Panchayat member Chandan who passed away during field work from Edavaka Panchayat mentioned that during the time of Pazhassi Raja, the Kurichias were given land in plenty. During British rule, the Jenmam right was made supreme for easy extraction of revenue and the Kurichias lost their land to the jenmis. Extensive migration

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52 Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha (AGMS) is formed as a political organisation for Adivasis during the 48 day strike at the Thiruvananthapuram Secretariat.
into Wayanad is also reported by him as a reason for their loss of land and forest areas they used for *punam* (slash and burn) cultivation. A study conducted by the Centre of Excellence (2006) reports that the Adivasi population in Wayanad has limited capability to reacquire their alienated land through legal procedures due to lack of awareness and absence of supporting documentation to prove their ownership. According to their study, out of 439 respondents, 225 have their land possession under *Koottupatta* (joint title) and 134 households have possession under *individual patta*. In both types of *pattas*, the average size of land holding is 5 cents to 50 cents. About 30 families have *koottupatta* above 5 acres and this belongs to Mullukuruman and Kurichia joint families. On the contrary, in the study area, most of the Paniya families are packed in their *colonies* within 2 to 5 cents and there are very few who own more than half acre of land and they seldom have land records.

**Table: 8.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land ownership (area)</th>
<th>No: of families (36135)</th>
<th>Per centage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landless (zero land holding)</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>5.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 5cents</td>
<td>7001</td>
<td>19.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9cents</td>
<td>7817</td>
<td>21.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 24 cents</td>
<td>6231</td>
<td>17.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 49 cents</td>
<td>3252</td>
<td>8.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to &lt; 1 acre</td>
<td>4106</td>
<td>11.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 1 acre</td>
<td>6513</td>
<td>18.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36906</td>
<td>102.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: KILA survey report (2011). The report acknowledges that 771 families could acquire land in more than one way and that is the reason for minor differences in the total number of families.

According to the KILA survey report (2008), 8.28 per cent (1315 families) among Paniyas and 2.63 percent (153 families) among Kurichias are literally landless. 29.39
percent (4666 families) among Paniyas and 4.55 percent (265 families) among Kurichias are having less than five cents. While, 36.80 percent (2139 families) among Kurichias hold one acre or more land, among Paniyas only 7.44 percent (1182 families) falls in this category. Thus, 92.66 percent of Paniya families and 63.20 percent of Kurichia families are eligible for land according to the agreement made by the government to Adivasis in the year 2001 and the criteria decided by the Tribal Rehabilitation and Development Mission (TRDM) who are entrusted with the responsibility of distributing land to the Adivasis.53

**Kurichias and Tharavad Lands**

Kurichia settlements which hold large extents of land are commonly known as Kurichia *tharavad*ls. The Kurichias in the study area had *koottupatta* in the Karanavan’s name or individual *pattas*. During the field visits, it was observed that the total area of land in Chathavary *tharavad* was 40 acres of garden land and 21.20 acres of paddy fields. The property is divided among the members but individual records were not made. Thirteen families in the *tharavad* premises related to each other, hold garden land in the range of 20 cents to 5 acres. Out of the thirteen families, eight families hold paddy fields in the range of 27 cents to 5.65 acres. Naran from Chathavary *tharavad* said,

> Our *tharavad* is the *upasakha* (branch) of the main *tharavad* nearby. The land we hold is part of the land our earlier Karanavan has taken from Jenmi as *marupattam* (leased in-land for specified rent) for ten years. By giving a certain amount of money as per government rule it became our *thravadu* property.

Naran said that there were many Kurichias who cultivated on *jenmi’s* lands on the basis of *Marupattam* agreement. Marupattam agreement is signed between the *jenmi* and tenant and the tenant had the right to sell the lease to another tenant if he could pay the rent to the *jenmi* and tax to the government. This land was later bought by the migrants by paying meagre amounts or through encroachment. Also there were cases of the *jenmis* selling the land without the knowledge of the tenants, the Kurichias.

Naran wanted to keep his *tharavad* land as joint property; however, an educated member of his household who knew people in the state administration took the lead to convert it into an individual holding without proper discussion with the other members.

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53 According to the Government agreement with Adivasi leaders and TRDM criteria, Adivasis who hold less than one acre are eligible to get one to five acres of land.
So there is strife among the members regarding the division of land and they are not paying the tax because the profit from the land is divided among them but the koottupatta is for the total land holding and it is still in the karanavan’s name who is no more. Naran, Karanavan’s marumakan (nephew) who assisted the Karanavan said that because of lack of consensus among the members, they were not approaching the village office to acquire individual pattas. The village office also ignores such disputes as they are unfamiliar with the customary laws of Kurichias. Naran reported,

I am not paying land revenue because the property division is not settled and the property is still in the old Karanavan’s name. I am the successor but cannot pay the tax alone for 40 acres as each individual has taken land and its income according to their might. Also, the village office does not ask any question and they are not bothered about settling the issue.

Another Kurichia settlement in the study area, the Tulsi tharavad is situated after a stretch of their own paddy fields and garden lands. A thodu was flowing at one side of their paddy fields and the Nalukettu (traditional tharavad houses in Kerala with a yard at the centre and buildings on four sides) in the midst of the gardens gave the impression of a traditional tharavad. Balakrishnan (34) from Tulsi tharavad says,

We had 100 acres of garden land and 40 acres of paddy fields before partition. When the government restricted the land holding of a joint family (in the 1970s), our Karanavar divided the hundred acres of garden land among 5 marumakkal, with 20 acres in each one’s name. One of them was my father. Now our makkal and marumakkal (our generation) constitute 33 families and we hold land in the range of 2 acres to 11 acres. Unlike our earlier generation, my father divided the property among makkal and marumakkal. Now there are more than 100 acres of land as some members also bought land individually.

Eran (72) from Tulsi tharavad narrated the story of acquiring land from the jenmis,

When the government raised the land revenue, Jenmi gave 100 acres to us because he could not pay the revenue for all his land. When the Jenmi asked it back the Menon and Sipayi (village man who goes to each household to measure the plot of land) helped us retain it. The Village adhikari (village officer) informed us to acquire land and make the documents. The jenmi’s son being a friend of the Karanavan of tharavad helped to make the documents. Even after making the documents, the jenmis tried to sell the trees in our land and we resisted this move with the help of the officials.

Among the three selected Kurichia nuclear families in the study area, two families held 42 cents each and another family holds half acre of garden land. They said that it was their earlier tharavad Kaivasabhumi (land under their possession) and they received
original pattayam for it in the 1970s. Among the three, one of the families lost the pattayam.

Over the years, the Kurichia community has become accustomed to the concept of private property. They have realised the importance of keeping record for land to save it from alienation. Some of the Kurichia elders from different tharavads stated that they have kept a certain amount of land as common tharavad land to meet the expenses for the various ritual celebrations including marriage and death ceremonies of tharavad members. For instance, Tulsi tharavad kept 13 out of 100 acres of their garden land and 10 out of 40 acres of their paddy fields as common property of the tharavad. They value the tharavad as the institution that hands over traditions to the new generation and binds the joint family.

They started taking the initiative for that through an organisation called Kurichia Samudaya Vikasana Samithi. The Kurichias mentioned that they had 107 mittams (tharavads) earlier but now it is reduced to 56 due to modern development policies and land laws. However, their initiative to keep the remaining tharavads as an institution with few acres of common land to conduct all their lifecycle rituals and joint cultivation practices and to sustain their strong bond among its members show their resistance to modern development trends. In such cases, even though the families are technically separated as they have divided the property and made separate houses with government aid, they could keep up the tie with the institution of tharavad, and engage in all their rituals and joint cultivation practices.

When government policies restricted the landholdings of the tharavads and introduced incentives to individual owners, Kurichias divided up their land. In Chathavary tharavad, Naran narrates,

When the government stipulated that there should not be more than 20 acres of land in one individual’s name even in the case of joint property, the Kurichia community also started acquiring individual shares and land records realising that otherwise they would lose land.

However, the Kurichia elders stated that there are disputes among the members of Kurichia tharavads over partition of their tharavad lands. According to them, these
disputes have to be settled through negotiation among the community members as well as with the village officials to obtain proper records. Chathavaryl Naran insisted,

At least now land records should be corrected and updated. A community which was intimately bound and concerned about the collective security of its members than about individual security, now faces daily strife among its members over property division.

According to the Kurichias, the strife is intensified by the ignorance of the authorities about their culture and social organisation and hence indifferent to resolving the problem. Even though Naran was critical about the state policies and local power structures which destroyed their traditional leadership and landholding patterns, he now expressed helplessness and turned to the state to arbitrate. There is no other way to negotiate unless they regain self rule. Krishna (34) and Manjan (56) from Tulsi Kurichia tharavads mentioned that there are several court cases which are not settled as the Kurichia tradition is different from the Hindu Act and Christian Act which govern property rights in India. Even though internal conflicts regarding land were reported among the Kurichias in the study area, they had at least small plots for their subsistence unlike majority of the Paniyas who did not hold any land for their subsistence.

The Paniyas and their ‘Colony’ Land

In history, a ‘colony’ is a territory which comes under the immediate political control of the state. Even today, Paniya settlements in Wayanad are known as Paniya colonies and they question the entry of their settlement name as colonies in their respective panchayats saying that they have kudumbapperu (family or clan name). However, the Paniya community is confined to their government built thickly packed ‘tiled and concrete houses’- ‘Paniya colonies’ as the state calls it.

The Paniya community staying in Arayal colony in the study area, holds only about 1 to 5 cents of land except one woman holding 20 cents and another who bought 10 cents recently. Majority of them have only one small hut and a small yard. There is no space for them to perform their ritual practices or for waste disposal or toilet facilities. Majority of the Paniyas who hold small measures of land (1cent, 2 cent or 5 cent) in this colony had no land records. In the village office also there was no clear record with sketch. While enquiring about the reason, the village officers said that as per the rule when the old parent
dies they have to do ozhumuriyadharam to transfer the property to their heirs. Paniyas are not doing ozhumuriyadharam and not paying the taxes regularly.

Arayal colony also had experienced loss of the lands they had used in the early independent period. This colony is situated near the main road and amidst the thickly packed colony houses, there were shops of non-Adivasis. From the location of the shops, we get an impression that those were Adivasi lands before because the colony is divided into two parts on the roadside where these shops are located. While enquiring how they acquired land amidst the Adivasi houses, non-Adivasis as well as village officials said that they bought it from one Chetti landlord of that area. I noticed that non-Adivasis were more curious than the Adivasis about the purpose of my visiting the place, my identity and engagement with the Paniya people. Since I was aware of the court verdict to restore Adivasi’s alienated lands and the various efforts of Adivasis themselves to occupy land in different areas of Wayanad, I could understand their curiosity while asking about land details. However, the Paniyas also were reluctant to talk about their land details on my first visit. Repeated visits and stay in the colony helped to break their fear and on further enquiry, Kaippan from a Paniyan colony mentioned that his uncle had one and half acres of land, and that he had given a portion away to non-Adivasis for a meagre amount. He said that one non-Adivasi bought his uncle’s land on the roadside, promising land from his share in another area. The non-Adivasis continue to possess the land and cultivate it and the Adivasis never asked for the land due to them. It appears that since resurvey has not been done in that area, no separate sketch has been prepared for Adivasi lands and such transactions became easy for non-Adivasis with the help of the village officer.

There are several loopholes in the law which restricts Adivasis’ selling their property to non-Adivasis. One of the village office staff reported that non-Adivasis can buy Adivasi land with the collector’s permission. Otherwise, exchange of land is possible by producing written records to show that the present land that the Adivasis occupy is not inhabitable or by showing that they have sold the land for loan repayment to banks. It was evident from the conversation that the non-Adivasi village officials and the people around are very vigilant to protect the non-Adivasis who had illegally purchased Adivasi land by keeping it a secret.
Only one old woman, Raba (75) from Arayal Paniya colony showed an old piece of paper when asked to show the patta agreement for land. The written matter using ink was not clear and with effort one could read 83 cents. She did not know how much land she has in that document but showed 20 cents of land around her house as what is remaining after dividing it with her relatives for building a house. Others interviewed revealed that they had lost the record or that they did not have any record for the few cents their houses occupied.

Another settlement of the Paniyas at Valliyoorkavu is thickly packed and each family has a small house and a yard. They have no patta for this piece of land they hold, but only kaivasarekha (record of right). Pachan Mooppan (80) from Valli colony said that the patta was with the temple authorities and that Paniyas were considered the temple’s dependents. As dependents, the Paniyas have received 10 cents of land from the hereditary owners of the temple. These 10 cents were again divided when the members increased in the Paniya families and the members built separate houses for themselves. Pachan Mooppan said,

I had half acre of land. But when my relatives who did not receive any land came and asked, I gave them land to build a house. If I live alone who will be there to do my death rituals?

Pachan being the Mooppan who has to provide the labourers for the temple duties, was allowed to occupy a larger share of half acres by the temple authorities. However, he has divided it among his relatives and married sons and daughters. Owing to lack of space and the congested situation now, waste water and rain water from his daughter’s house flow towards Mooppan’s house, causing the mud wall between their houses to collapse.

Naman (53) from Richur colony, Cheengeri project (envisioned for bonded Adivasi labourers) area reported that due to their continuous struggle to get land records, a few of them received pattas in their settlement in 2004. Naman got a record for 57 cents, Prabhath (68) got 1 acre and 80 cents and other two 1 acre, 20 cents respectively. Naman’s children and other relatives could occupy only 10 cents each due to scarcity of land. Resurvey was done and they are waiting for the records. Naman is again involved in strikes for acquiring land for his children and relatives according to the government promise of one acre of land.
Generally, the Paniyas preferred community living with their kith and kin and divided the small plots of land their Mooppans had among themselves without keeping it exclusively as one’s private property. Because of this arrangement majority of the Paniya houses in the study area did not have space for waste disposal.

Eva from the Paniya community says,

Now we have no place even to spit or for waste disposal. One of our Mooppans had paddy fields with patta but now the stage for performing programmes during Valliyoorkavu festival is being arranged there. He also held the record for our burial land at Vemom. But according to my knowledge, after his death nobody holds the records and non-Adivasis are encroaching.

Lavan (65), the Oorumoooppan from Kunnil Paniya colony who is an important religious functionary in the community as well as the medical practitioner of the surrounding colonies stated:

There is no boundary for land among us. We all want to survive on this earth until we die. When our own people are struggling for a small piece of land to make their huts we will not possess it alone without giving them. I have the records for 1 acre and 10 cents of lands. I have given my relatives permission to build houses in my land and the Panchayat asked me for a signature for a written ‘no objection’ for using my land for building these houses.

In a group discussion, Paniya members revealed that even though there is provision to purchase land elsewhere, Panchayat authorities obtain permission from their Mooppan to build new houses for his relatives from his share of land while sanctioning funds from the Panchayat. It appears that the values of community living and egalitarianism of the Paniya Mooppan is exploited by Panchayat members by making use of their lands for building newly sanctioned houses. It is ironical to note that instead of finding out more land to purchase for the landless Adivasis, the local Panchayat administration, irrespective of the ruling party, again forces them to divide it by sanctioning houses without allotting land for building them.

Lavan Mooppan (65) is a strong supporter of the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPI (M), and he reported that he received help and advice from his party in acquiring land. He applied to the collectorate for land and he agreed to pay the purchase price in instalments fixed by the Government. On the first visit, he mentioned that he has land records and during the second visit he said that he lost his patta during heavy rains. While staying with them, I discussed the importance of land records to protect their land from
alienation and during my next visit he showed me some torn pieces of printed papers and when I joined the pieces together we could make out that it was the land record he had received in 1976 according to KLR Act 1963 (photo 33). On enquiry it was found that such records were not found in other colonies in the core areas of study.

The historical advantage of being Pazhassi’s warriors and the better political and social status enjoyed by the Kurichias helped them to receive a comparatively better treatment from the state bureaucracy and jenmis than Paniyas, who were bonded labourers. However, Kurichia’s relationships with the Jenmis were far better than with the Paniyas and there were Kurichias who received land from the jenmis. The Jenmis used to send the Kurichias to meet government officials to carry out the jenmi’s duties. In the case of Paniyas they stated that, the Jenmis frightened them saying that the officers are meat eaters and advised them to keep away from them. The Paniya elders remembered that they would get frightened when a person came in a white and tidy dress and they kept away from all officials and other non-Adivasis except their landlords who employed them. As Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam (2007) point out, when the jenmi leased out their land to the settlers, Paniyas who were living on the edges of their land were forced to move out.

**Issues Related to Record Keeping**

While reporting about the condition of land records, a village officer from Arayal mentioned that a few Paniyas and Kurichias got their land records in the 1970s, when the surplus land and revenue land was distributed to them during the land reform period according to KLR Act. However, the village officer reported that from 1965 to 2004, they had distributed 2 acres and 21 cent among 18 Paniyas in the Arayal colony area. It was evident that village officers also were not very sure about the extent of land given to the Paniyas as in my next visit the amount of land distributed was reported to be more than 3 acres.

The Government jenmom (give English equivalent) right was established in the lands assigned for Adivasis if it is not private janmom of the jenmis as discussed in the history chapter. Thus, to cut trees in the government assigned land, Paniyas and Kurichias had to pay a fixed amount called vrikshavila (price decided by the government for trees in
government assigned land) to the village office for each tree they cut for their use or for sale. According to a village officer, some of the Adivasis gave their records to business people who came to buy the trees in their land to pay the *vrikshavila* in the village office as per rule. After paying *vrikshavila*, the business people cut the trees and they went back without giving back the *pattayam* to the Paniyas and Kurichias. For instance, Swathy mentioned that her uncle had *thatkalika* (temporary) *pattayam* for the land and when the business people came to buy the trees, another educated uncle made the original *pattayam* of that plot in his name with the help of the village officer as the original *patta* should be produced in the village office to pay the *vrikshavila*. Now her educated uncle also says that he lost the *patta*. So she assumes that the business people took it to pay the *vrikshavila* and thus they might have lost them. Her eldest uncle Aron approached the village office thrice for making new records, but they refused to give it to him on grounds that they had already issued the original *patta* for that land. While discussing the issue with Aron, he said,

> It is said that laws are created in favour of the Adivasis. However, when we go to the office they do not even show the minimum respect they show to an insect. If they get money, they do things for Adivasis. From Adivasis they will not get a *naya paisa* (one paisa), they do not want to do things for Adivasis. One village *adhikari* by name Kunjuraman asked me for a sum of Rs. 10,000 to make a copy of my lost *patta*. So I could not get it and I am still struggling to get the record. If I know someone in the political circles, things will be easier.

It appears that even now the land records of Adivasis are not settled and corruption is not ruled out fully from the village level to higher offices of revenue.

However, the Paniyas, who had a nomadic culture could not fully perceive even now the logic of exclusively holding private property and paying tax. It appears that the common lands they used were taken by the government as government *jenmam* and part of it is assigned to a few Adivasis by the state to extract tax. The Adivasis’ right to the common lands they used was completely neglected by the state while assigning land without giving importance to their perceptions of community right. According to the report of the village officer, they resist paying the tax regularly. A village officer mentioned that they adopt different methods to extract tax when Paniyas show resistance. An Arayal village officer stated,

> Paniya people are reluctant to accept others and they do whatever they want. Even though they are told to pay the tax they will not turn up and they say that it is not possible. If they
are informed that there is some help from the government they will come and collect it. We use these visits as an opportunity to make them pay the tax money.

As Scott (2010: xiii) points out, “To the degree that the identity is stigmatised by the larger state or society, it is likely to become for many a resistant and defiant identity.” However, the negligence in tax payment increases the possibility of alienation of land.

There were no clear land records in the village office too for the meager amounts of land that the Adivasis hold. When the Appappara village officer was asked about it, he said,

Earlier, when jennis and other rich land owners owned huge chunks of land, we could collect the tax in each thandaperu (account number). They sold it as a bulk and it was easy to change the thandaperu. But later when many people bought small pieces from the bulk it was very difficult to change the survey sketch and thandaperu after each transaction. So all such transactions in which the thandaperu has not changed are together included in one account called ‘14th number account’ or therattu and in this account we collect tax without separate thandaperu. As per the rule, we have to collect a fixed amount of tax for the area. If we can achieve the targeted amount there is no need to check whether each person has payed the tax or not. We have to do resurvey if we have to sketch the land of each individual holder and change the thandaperu and to keep separate record for each individual.

However, the village officer revealed that the amount extracted from each individual holder is more than the stipulated amount which has to be paid to the government. So it is not necessary to get tax from each and every individual to achieve the target amount for the total area under each village office. By May 31st the targeted amount of tax has to be collected. Once the target amount is achieved, they cannot record lapse in tax payment. And if there is no nikuthi kudissika (lapse in tax payment) recorded, they cannot take action for japti. If one acre holder has kudissika for three years, during his payment, the tax will be triple the amount. Also since the land transaction is happening within a year, more than once the tax comes from different owners for the same plot. So there is no need to track the individual tax kudissika every time and there is no provision to take action.

According to the report of one village officer, the Paniya colony is in the name of one or two Mooppans who died decades back and the recent inhabitants have no patta (title deed) for their land. While enquiring about the patta, the common answer was ...“it got burned when the roof made of straw caught fire” or “it is lost in the heavy rains”. However, majority of the Paniyas did not get the patta for the lands they accessed during the feudal period as they were illiterate and ignorant of the process of acquiring pattas
and were not aware of the importance of that document. They thought that the land they
cultivated and the land in which they buried their ancestors was always theirs. Arayal
colony even lost their burial land and now they bury their dead in the forest nearby.

One Paniya family in Kunnil colony mentioned that they have *patta* for half acres of
land. They complained to me about a non-Adivasi who dug on the boundary of their half
acres of land to acquire more. I asked them to complain in the panchayat or police station.
Then they revealed that they did not have the *patta* for that land even though they had
been staying there for more than two decades. On further enquiry, it was revealed that the
Paniya family who previously stayed there had a *patta* for that land and when they left for
another location, the recent inhabitants occupied that area. In this case, due to the
nomadic nature (move from one place to another according to the seasons as a method of
subsistence) of the Paniya people, even the family who got the *patta* for a small plot of
land left the area without selling the land and did not take care to transfer the *patta* to the
next Paniya inhabitants in that area.

It was observed that even though they do not have a *patta*, when Paniyas meet a non-
Adivasi, they say that they have a *patta* as they are frightened of losing even their small
plots of land. On my first visit many of them told me that they have *patta* even though
they revealed slowly that they do not have it or they had lost it. It emerges that even now
many Paniyas have either not realised the importance or are unable to deal with the
complicated procedural requirements. Thus, it becomes easy for the non-Adivasi people
to acquire Adivasi land with the help of village officials. Village officers are not found to
be serious about keeping clear land records of the Paniyas and the extraction of tax from
them, and in a way it helps in adjustments when non-Adivasis buy or encroach upon
Adivasi property. In the case of Paniyas, it was observed that transferring of property to
the heirs is not done systematically through the village office and in such cases, the
records are still in the name of the Adivasi ancestors.

In addition to lack of land and official documents, the Adivasis as a whole and
especially the Paniyas lost the common property resources such as natural forests,
grasslands and wastelands on which they depended for subsistence.

**Politics of Land, Redistribution and Experiences of the Adivasis**
Treating land as private property and a commodity for making profit is widespread in Wayanad and the Adivasis’ perception of it as a composite, material, cultural and divine entity and a community asset is not taken seriously in the state’s redistribution process. However, when the land question of Adivasis became crucial in Wayanad due to their movements, the state was forced to search for land to distribute. But the non-Adivasi perceptions still hold on to the idea that if at all they need land, they need only rocky and unfertile land in interior areas. For instance, in Deepika news paper it was reported that in Cee Cee, Kalpetta, Wayanad, 47 acres of revenue land was surveyed for being given to Adivasis. There are reports that non-Adivasis in the area blocked this move by saying that this beautiful landscape can be used for other developmental activities like tourism, educational institutions or other public institutions, and distributing it to Adivasis is described by non-Adivasis in that area as reflecting lack of long term vision of the Ministers. This prevented any further effort at redistribution (Deepika, 29 August 2012).

In the study area, I have heard comments from non-Adivasis such as, “Paniyas are not interested in cultivating in their own lands”, “Paniyas need land only for making a house”, “If they were given land Wayanad would have remained a barren land” and so on. The following section will look in detail into the state policies and interventions related to land and how these affect the Adivasis in their dispossession and marginalisation.

**Land Reforms – Reflections from the Field**

The Adivasi land issue was a completely neglected area in Kerala’s development experience and even the much acclaimed land reform movements alienated them further from the land they belonged to with its neglect of the cultural rights of Adivasis and its preferential policy option for cash crops. Land reforms generally mean the redistribution of land to the landless and deprived classes and it is known as ‘land to the tiller’ programme. In contrast, as Ajit (2002) points out, during land reforms, the serfs, the real cultivators of land were deprived from self cultivation and permanent settlement, as they were pushed out from the *Jenmi Kudiyyan* system. He traces the caste and class continuum in the land reform policies of the state. He challenges the claim that land reform has broken the chains of feudalism. Chantha from Paniya community said, “Our entire life
we worked for the *jenmis* and today where shall we go for land? We lost our lands when the *Jenmis* started giving it away to the migrants for small amounts without our consent.”

Chathavary, *tharavadu* Naran narrated,

The *Ooralars* (hereditary owners) who were also the *jenmis* gave the *Dewaswom* land, to non-Adivasi people as *Marupattam* or sold it for small amounts. Gradually, *Marupattam* holders made records using the Land Reform Act. Some Kurichias could make records for their land as they were cultivating the land on the basis of *Marupattam*.

The executive manager of Valliyoorkavu temple, said that prior to land reforms, temple properties were large and extended more than 1,000 acres, which were administered by the *Devaswom*. Gradually the *Ooralars* gave a good amount of land for private cultivation on *Marupattam* basis.

However, the Kurichias were adversely affected as the Land Reform Act stipulated that a joint family (a family with five members and children) could keep only fifteen acres. When the number increased in the family they could add one acre with an upper limit of twenty acres. At the same time, a nuclear family could keep seven acres. So, many Kurichia *tharavads* did partition, realising that otherwise they would lose land. There are also *tharavads* like Chathavary where the record is still in the Karanavan’s name, but each family member took land according to his power without making any records and there is strife among the *tharavad* members. Naran’s *tharavad* property had an extent of 40 acres of land as joint property. Naran reported his experience of assisting the *Karanavar* for fifteen years in the *tharavad* as a responsible *marumakan* (nephew) and secretary and the problems he faced because his *tharavad* did not partition land according to Land Reform Act. He said,

We were not supposed to keep 40 acres of land and the agricultural income tax (*Vanijya nikuthi*) was introduced for our property. I went to Kannur court and appealed and managed to get exemption from agricultural tax for being from a joint family. The Court set up an enquiry committee and they realised the extent of a Kurichia joint family and exempted us from the extra tax. But, those who got a government job in our *tharavad* wanted individual property and wanted to change our customary laws regarding property. They forgot the

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54 Temples in Kerala are managed by *Devaswoms*. *Devaswom* is a socio-religious trust with government or community nominated members as trustees to manage its assets and ensure the functioning of traditional rituals and customs ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devaswom_boards_in_Kerala](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devaswom_boards_in_Kerala)) accessed on 17/7/2012.

Prior to the implementation of Land Reform Act temple properties had an extent of 1,400 acres (Jayashanker nd).
community and joined sides with the government. Now Ammavan’s (uncle’s) own children as well as his marumakkal (sons in law) have divided the land according to each one’s interest and influence, without negotiating with the other members. Now I am not able to pay the tax for forty acres.

According to Therakam (2009), the customary laws of the Adivasis in Kerala are not yet codified and it is essential to compile, codify and recognise them.

From the statements of the Paniya elders, it was evident that at the time of land reforms, they did not take it too seriously to achieve written documents for their lands, as they had not fully realised the concept of private land and its consequences in their lives. Village officials and non-Adivasis did not inform them about the consequence because the feudal remnants persisted after independence and even after the Land Reform Act was passed. They perceived the Paniyas as slaves and not considered to be worthy of ownership of land. However, one Kurichia Karanavar reported that there were Kurichias who got support from the village adhikaris and jenmis to make records even though there were cases of cheating by jenmis and the non-Adivasis to encroach Kurichia land.

According to a newspaper report (The Indian Express, September 4, 2008, page 9), in 1968, the government had estimated that 8,75,000 acres of land would be available for redistribution in Kerala. But they could acquire only around 1,24,000 acres out of which only 96,000 acres were redistributed. The rest of the land has been usurped illegally. Since trusts were exempt from ceilings, land was spirited away through the trusts and by registering deeds in false names or in other ways. According to this report, the non-tenant Adivasis, Dalits and coastal people of Kerala were excluded from this redistribution.

The issue of unauthorised occupations of land by the rich landed class at the time of land reform was under scrutiny by the media and the public during the study period. For instance, even a member of the legislative assembly is under allegation of keeping the government land unauthorisedly in Krishnagiri village, Wayanad. He filed a petition (W.P. (C).No.16422 OF 2007) for assignment of 16.75 acres of government land in his possession which he claimed to have received by succession from his grandfather. In the high court order dated September 9, 2007 and June 1, 2011, it is clearly stated that according to the KLR Act, the maximum limit to be assigned for cultivation is 50 cents of land. The judgement clearly indicates that the Kerala Land Assignment Act and Rules are intended for assigning government land to landless people and the petitioner, who already
owns 50 acres, was not eligible for assignment of government land under any category. Land held in excess had to be surrendered to the government and no compensation was to be paid for the lands so surrendered.55 However, till date (July 2012) the petitioner had not surrendered or the government had not acquired the land for redistribution. Being powerful, the petitioner could even suspend the High Court order. Encroachers were evicted and he also enjoyed police protection for the land for the time being. As Saxena (1988) points out, in the process of democratisation, the bureaucracy has been politicised at all levels and consequently it became self oriented or party oriented.

It emerges that more than acquiring the surplus and untitled land from the Jenmis, plantation owners or rich landed class and redistributing it to the landless, the thrust of land reform was spreading plantations and cash crop cultivation. Ajit (2002) critically analyses the land ownership pattern and the special preference to the cash crop cultivation adopted by the government during the land reform period. Isac’s (2008) stress in change in the land use pattern as a continuation of the land reform is a recognition of the historical injustice underlying the government policies and thus appreciable. However, he cannot negate a second land reform as the stories of excess, untitled, illegal holdings of land by the rich landed class and plantation owners have been brought to light today. And he cannot compromise a just distribution of land by diverting the attention to the mistakes in land use pattern. For instance, if the Paniyas and landless Kurichias were entrusted with the paddy fields, it could have remained green and protected with its numerous micro organisms and life forms as experience shows.56

**Plantations and the Land Politics**

The expansion of plantations reduced the availability of common lands for the Adivasis. Adivasi leaders among them reported that there were incidents of forceful eviction of

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55 The High Court also mentioned that the petitioner had also not met the terms of Sub Rule (3) as far as in Ext. R1(a) there was a finding that the petitioner is in possession of 62.23 acres of government land. So the judgement dated June 1, 2011 asked the petitioner to surrender all government land in his possession or otherwise the government could take over all the land in his possession within three months from the date of receipt of the copy of the judgement and distribute it to landless scheduled tribe members (Judgement by High Court Kerala on June 1, 2011).

56 In the study area Kurichias did not converted their paddy fields for any other purpose other than using small plots for banana cultivation recently. The water sources like ponds and thodus are also not vanished in their paddy fields unlike in the non-Adivasi fields (photo). Paniyas also could have preserved it as their diet practices were very much connected with paddy fields and its eco system.
Adivasis to begin plantations in Wayanad. According to Rammohan (2008) the persistence of colonial patterns of ownership of plantations remains one of the weaknesses of land reform programmes in Kerala. As Nideesh (2008) points out, in the Land Reform Act, estates were exempt from land ceiling to increase the production in the agricultural sector and considering plantations as social institutions meant giving security to its workers. On the contrary, studies point out that plantations were not worker friendly and that their workers still remain poor and landless (Nideesh 2008). Thus, it appears that even though they amassed the land of people through favourable policies, there were no welfare measures for the workers, many of whom were Adivasis, other than giving them employment.

Allegations regarding the illegal land holdings of different plantations especially against the Harrison Malayalam Limited (HML) were very much alive at the time of the field work. The Government appointed a High Level Committee to enquire about the land holdings of HML in Kerala and later a special investigation team. The enquiry report of the special investigation team revealed that illegal ownership of land by plantations and undeserved benefits allotted to the plantation owners is one main reason for landlessness of poor people in Kerala. The court cases of surplus land of HML in Vaithiri Taluk Land Board in Wayanad are still pending.

This illegal acquisition of land is not limited to HML but large areas of surplus land cases are pending in Mananthavady Taluk Land Board (TLB) in the name of various individuals and estates. An individual had 2794.48 acres while another had 324.55 acres of land. Fourteen other people had comparatively smaller extents. An estate was seen to have 649.20 acres (Mananthavady RDO files). In Vaithiri Taluk, 29 cases are pending (ibid) but they were very reluctant to give the details. When these stories of plunder became public Adivasis started encroaching land at different sites but they were evicted using police force.

One of the previous sub collectors reported,

The main allegation is planters holding land without any title, which is actually government land and not even registered as plantation. This allegation cannot be solved by TLB. The

57 Interview with Janu on December 27 2009, at Panavally, Wayanad.
58 HML is a company registered in England in the name Malayalam Plantation (UK) Limited.
only thing which can be done from here is to deal with the matter if they are illegally holding any land ‘in the plantations’ beyond land ceiling. This can be found out by checking how much landholding the planters had on 1/1/1970. If they had land more than that, it would imply they had illegal holdings with surplus land. In Mananthavady TLB, I had to hear all the cases. We were dealing with 30 or 40 years old cases and fortunately we were able to finish a bulk of them. However, people think that when the surplus land issue is solved everything will be alright. In the major plantations, the main issue is possession without title and I think nobody wants to address this issue and TLB cannot do anything about it.

This indicates the lack of efficiency of the administrative and legal set up to deal with the land cases since cases had been pending from the 1970s. As one Sub Collector in Mananthavady took personal interest, he could finish most of the cases in Mananthavady TLB except 17 which had been pending due to highcourt cases. The lack of up to date records of land ownership and transaction in revenue offices was also pointed out as a drawback by the Sub Collector,

Without a title if you have kept any government land it should be tackled by the revenue apparatus. Unless we have a good apparatus in the revenue administration (Village officer and Thahasildar and staff) we cannot do that. According to KLC (Kerala Land Conservancy) Act, we need to deal with it as we dealt with encroachment. But for that again, the Land records should be original. Unfortunately, in Wayanad the land record keeping is not updated. Record mutation (entering the names of heirs in the record of rights) is not done systematically. If record mutation is done systematically, the thandaperu will be changed to the legal land holder and illegal transactions can be traced.

This shows how the bureaucratic, political and legal apparatus become a tool to serve the planters and alienate the people who really deserve land to cultivate for their sustenance. Registered as plantations, they are enjoying a large area of land for private use and with that privilege, keeping surplus land and untitled land shows the extreme exploitation of the landless. The Taluk offices hesitated to reveal the extent of surplus land and untitled land the big planters held. They said that plantation owners have cases in the court and thus they could not reveal the extent of land they hold. Even with RTI requests, they were reluctant to reveal the controversial land details. One RDO staff revealed that there was order to acquire 1800 acres of land from HML (according to the special investigation report 1842.22 acres). This has been pending in the high court and so nothing can be done. Here we see that the state and the political system are controlled by the capitalist large scale land owners including international plantations.

In a personal interview, one Tahsildar gave an explanation for the long inaction regarding acquiring the untitled land with the planters,
The planters are utilising this land for many years and one fine morning we cannot go and acquire their land and give it to the Adivasis. Even though it is unlawful possession, they have the right to go to the Supreme Court. They bring the best lawyers to fight and so these cases take a long time to get settled.

The paradox is that the wastelands used by the Adivasis earlier were acquired by the state and were converted to revenue lands which were then illegally occupied by estate owners and the landed class.

One Taluk officer reported,

Most of the government land is in somebody’s possession today. The village revenue department has the responsibility to protect government land. But we could not take a stand without the support of the ruling party. Also if the land is in one’s possession for more than 12 years, then they have possessional lease right and they can approach court if we have taken any action against them. We have already reported many cases to the government. If government takes action and acquires the land, the land owner can approach the court against government. Usually government will not take up the case. Further, in big estates like Harrison, the surplus and untitled land can be located only through satellite survey. Kerala state has only one unit for satellite survey and they are now investigating only in Idukky-Moonnar area.

This indicates that the administrative set up is indirectly forced to serve the capital and the implementation of laws become difficult. However, the myth that there is no land for distributing to the Adivasi people is broken by Adivasi leaders, the few Adivasi sympathisers among administrators, civil society and by Adivasi representatives in Panchayat, Block and District levels. A Kurichia Block president challenged the state and its bureaucracy and said,

We will show the land available for distribution. Let the administrators distribute it. Other than the illegal holdings of the plantations, even in the projects meant for Adivasis there is plenty of undistributed land. In Sugandagiri and Cheengeri Adivasi rehabilitation projects, there is land remaining for distribution. In Priyadarsini, another project meant for Adivasis there are 179 acres of land under survey number 68/ID and it is not utilised for any purpose. There is plenty of land and the Administrators have to be ready to distribute it among Adivasis.

Further, various other policies of the government attract land grabbers from other parts of Kerala to Wayanad.

Land ‘Mafia’, Tourism and Commercialisation of Land

Land is a very dear commodity in Wayanad since the colonial period onwards. As elsewhere in India, in Wayanad too there is the presence of land mafia which acquires,
develop and sell land in illegal ways. As described in the section on plantations the poor record keeping and the unfinished resurvey programmes create a favourable atmosphere for land ‘mafias’ to flourish. As Ajith (2002) points out, during land reform, the sustainable production oriented value of land changed and land became a commodity to acquire maximum profit. Thus, the speculative trade of land flourished.

The use of land purely as a commodity by real estate speculators increases the price of land. Also due to continuous transactions, land was not used for cultivation, a way leading to lack of employment and food crisis especially for the Paniya people. Even in the small villages in the study area, there were several land brokers/real estate agents as this ‘business’ was hugely profitable.

The latest trend of Kerala is the tourism model of development to compensate the loss of foreign money from cash crop in Wayanad. Recently the tourist promotion policies have a message, ‘green and clean’ (Mathrubhumi, 7 June, 2012). Tourism development was another area the land mafias are involved in to devour land as well as the scarce natural resources of Wayanad (Jacob 2006). Tourism promotion by the state in Wayanad encourages the trend of accumulating as much land as possible on the fringes of the forests for tourism development and this again affects the Adivasis’ who still partially depend on natural resources for their livelihood. However, Wayanad was declared one of the tourism districts and Adivasi cultural festivals are widely advertised for tourism promotion from 2000 onwards. As Jacob (2006) observes, other than the cultural and environmental degradation, tourism promotion creates an artificial price hike in the land market which compels the small farmers to part with their landholdings. This trend also affects the ecological balance of the region.

Adivasi leader Janu reported,

Without distributing the already purchased land in Aralam farm using Adivasi development funds, the government is again planning to buy land for Adivasi people. This is to help the land mafia flourish in Wayanad. To give to the landless Adivasi people in Kannur and Wayanad, they have bought land in Aralam, spending 42 crores from the Tribal Sub Plan fund and from that, the government is giving 3500 acres as free provision to a private company and then again planning to buy land for the Adivasi people. For that the government has entrusted Rs. 50 crores to the Wayanad collector. If there is no land in
Wayanad, why is the government bringing the strikers from Chengara and Plachimada and giving land in Wayanad?59

However, buying land, keeping it for few months or years and selling it has become the most profitable business in Wayanad today. Land is purchased by a merchant and then sold in an unchanged state at a profit. Refering to Marx (1981), Hardiman (1990) uses the concept ‘merchant capital’, in which the quantity of the capital increases while leaving the object’s essential quality unchanged, to understand such transactions. The profit from such business is huge and in recent times, the ‘merchant capital’ is being diverted more and more into land speculation in Wayanad. This tendency can be seen at the village level by migrant local land dealers as well as by land dealers from neighbouring cities and towns. On the other hand, the small scale subsistent farmers and large scale farmers are tempted to sell their property due to pest attack and price fluctuations in the agricultural products. Those who buy these lands, sell them for more profit or keep them barren for long without any productive purpose.

**Land Acquisition for Development by the State**

The Indian state is continuing land acquisition for various development projects and the Adivasis are the worst victims in Wayanad as elsewhere in India. Pinto (1998) points out that the Indian state has operated through the same legal and economic framework and displaced about 300 lakhs of people in the name of development in the last 50 years and 40 per cent among the displaced have been Adivasi people. According to Mohanty (2005), when Adivasis are asked for such a great sacrifice in the name of public purpose, the state has a great responsibility to ensure that they are secure and living in a better situation than before. In the recent Draft National Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement bill 2011, for private acquisitions the consent of 80 per cent of the

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59 A newspaper Malayala Manorama (2011, March 23) reported that 30 people who were involved in Chengara land struggle were given land in Kottathara village, Wayanad, but only one family came to receive it. At Chenagara, Pathanamthitta district, Kerala the land struggle started from 4th August 2007, reclaiming ownership of land by the Dalits and Adivasis. The struggle was lead by *Sadhujana Vimochana Samyuktha Samara Vedi* organised by Laha Gopalan.

Plachimada struggle is another struggle lead by Adivasis at Perumatty Panchayat of Palakkad district, Kerala against the Coca Cola company. Government allotted land for few of the strikers of Plachimada and Chengara in Wayanad district.
affected people is stipulated. However, even in the new bill there is no provision to ensure the consent of people and Gram Sabhas during land acquisition for Governments projects and industries and this again ignores prior informed consent of the people and their right to take decisions affecting their lives.

The ‘prior informed consent’ of the Gram Panchayat is just an administrative procedure for documentation and even the people whose land is taken away for the project do not come to know about it until the implementation of the project. For instance, Nippan (65), a Kurichia from Champa colony was shocked to see some strangers on his land. He said,

When I approached the officers for clarification I found that they are from Bihar and they do not even know Malayalam. Without giving any clear explanation about the acquisition, the officers started giving directions to the wage labourers they had brought from Tamil Nadu to cut the trees on my field for erecting the electricity grid. Within a few days, a lawyer approached me and said “If you are ready to give me 10 per cent commission I will get you maximum compensation”. They have begun the work in 2007 and I filed a case for more compensation in 2010.

When local people enquired, the officials mentioned, “Since it is a central government project there is no need to get consent from the Gram Panchayat or the owner of the land. In the patta itself it is written that it is government land and only for the trees and cultivation they deserve compensation.” One portion of his land was clear felled for the grid construction and since the government was the encroacher, the owner had to keep silent and later filed a case to get maximum compensation. They were also fearful about the possibility of radiation from the electric grid and expressed their wish to move slowly to some other location.

Further, in Wayanad, large scale land acquisition was done for Karappuzha dam project and the project is not fully functional even after 33 years of its sanctioning. Execution of the project started in 1977 for a budget of rupees 50 crores and in 1999 the project was revised for Rs. 253 crores and still the work is pending.

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60 The Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation And Resettlement Bill, 2011
(http://rural.nic.in/sites/downloads/general/LS%20Version%20of%20LARR%20Bill.pdf
(accessed on 18/7/2012)
Naman from Richur colony, Ambalavayal panchayat said,

Vast areas of paddy fields were destroyed for this project and it became a real threat to Adivasi livelihood in that area. Many of them who were evicted from the site are still living in sheds and during the rainy season their condition is pathetic. Their employment opportunities were threatened due to this project. There is a lot left to be done to complete the dam even though the inauguration is over and it is partially functioning. If the remaining work was undertaken immediately, Adivasis could have got at least few days of wage labour. Now they are going to distant places for work.

Naman took me to the project site. When I asked an old lady in Paniya community who was evicted from the project area about where she was displaced from, she sarcastically retorted, “We all came from Thiruvithamkoor (Travancore, South Kerala) no? You are the people of this area”. She murmured to herself and disappeared into the temporary shed they had made (photo 34). Naman, a participant, with whose family I stayed during the field work, warned me not to talk with her and said that she was insane. From her words, I could sense the feeling of alienation that haunted her. The poverty stricken condition in the temporary shed and the expressions of deep dissatisfaction and anger on her face revealed the cultural alienation and livelihood deprivation due to forceful eviction. Naman mentioned that the rehabilitation process of the Adivasis was not complete. He said that a few of them received records for 20 cents but the land was not shown to them as yet. Joji, another social worker in that area, narrated the story of an Adivasi Mooppan who hesitated to go to the rehabilitated area saying “If we sink, let us sink and die here”.

According to the basic philosophy of Adivasi people, land belongs to the community. But the philosophy of the land acquisition bill still remains colonial and the state claims ownership and acquires land without the proper consent of the people concerned, especially in the case of Adivasis. The Adivasis also lack information regarding land acquisition laws and so they have not been able to protest for their rights.

**State Development Projects and Adivasi Experiences**

In the post independent period, few projects were planned to rehabilitate the freed bonded Adivasi labourers. An Adivasi settlement project was established in 1958 at Cheengeri to rehabilitate 100 families after developing a coffee estate and teaching them agriculture. The state government bought about 528 acres of land from the Tamil Nadu government at market price to give to the Adivasis, 5 acres each of the developed estate with proper title deeds. Instead of handing the land over to the Adivasi people, 182 acres were handed
over to the state agriculture department. When the government’s promises were not met and the social security measures failed, the Adivasi people set up huts and started their struggle on January 26, 1995. The State police brutally suppressed their struggle for the promised land. The local Adivasi organisation, Cheengeri Colony Samrakshana Samithy remained vigilant and continued their struggle. After the Muthanga struggle, the Adivasi land question was widely discussed and in 2004, 61.75 acres of land were assigned to 108 Adivasi people in Cheengeri (Taluk office files). Information received through RTI from Bathery Taluk office showed that, for 227 people 53.3603 hectares of land were given in Cheengeri. However, from the files, it was revealed that even though the order was passed in 2005, very few have got title deeds and now resurvey has to be done before giving the titles to the remaining people and this could pose an ‘administrative problem’.

The Cheengeri project was exclusively meant for Adivasis and each family was supposed to get five acres of land at the time of implementation of the project. The extent of land given to them in the recent pattayamela (title deed festival) conducted in Bathery ranges from 9 cents to 1 acre. Out of 39 Adivasis selected, there were only 6 who got nearly 1 acre and others received land in the range of 9 cents to 30 cents. This reveals the futility of government promises to the Adivasis even in case of project lands exclusively meant for them.

Later, in the year 1976, Sugandagiri Tribal Rehabilitation Project at Vythiri taluk, Pozhuthana Panchayat in Wayanad commenced to rehabilitate 750 bonded tribal families in 1500 hectares of vested forest land (KILA Survey Report 2011). Even though the Government suggested distributing two acres of vested forest to each family for cardamom cultivation they later decided to cultivate cardamom in the assigned land on a cooperative basis and formed a joint farming cooperative society to ensure better management and economic self sufficiency (Local Support Team, Paniyasadas 2010). The Local Support Team, Paniyasadas (2010) reported that the ‘bureaucratic slavery’ of the ‘freed bonded labourers’ was a reality in the project due to official corruption and malpractices, insufficiency of funds and errorious methods of cultivation. Owing to the financial crisis, the provident fund of the labourers was used for payment of wages and the society was dissolved on May 25, 2003 without having any option left for continuation (Local Support Team, Paniyasadas 2010). After the Muthanga land struggle,
the political parties and party based Adivasi organisations were forced to raise the issue of Adivasi land to maintain their hold among Adivasis. As a result, in 2004, 1850 acres of land were distributed among 370 families and 2684 acres are available for further distribution (collected fromcollectorate office files) in project land meant for them. A newspaper (*Mangalam*, June 30, 2004) reported that in Sugandagiri, land distribution was based on the lottery method and 610 hectares of land were allotted to 305 families that produced the necessary documents.

Prabhath from Richur colony said that his relatives have been staying in Sugandagiri and majority of the land allotted were less developed. Low quality of land and water scarcity are also reported as constraints to earn their livelihood from the land distributed to them. A few of the Paniya families were forced to lease their land as they had no other livelihood option. However, the Government was said to be projecting this as an excuse for not distributing the remaining land to Adivasis in Sugandagiri. The Local Support Team, Paniyasadas (2009) reported that there was no support from the government to develop the land and instead of title deeds only possession certificates were provided for using it for agricultural purposes. As they reported, this land could have been mandatorily distributed to them under the Vested Forest Act earlier. A retired Adivasi Development officer said that the government gives only one time assistance and there is no concept of continuous support or follow up till the Adivasis become self sufficient.

The Pookode Dairy Project was another government initiative in 1979 to rehabilitate the bonded Adivasi labourers by generating employment opportunities and utilising the resources from land for the welfare of the different Adivasi groups in Wayanad. The Dairy project was closed in 1998 and the 100 acres of land meant for the welfare of Adivasis was transferred to the Kerala Agricultural University for the establishment of a veterinary college subject to the conditions of 1) appointment of Adivais as farm labourers 2) priority for other posts within the college for qualified persons from Adivasi community 3) rehabilitation of the 26 families evicted for the college in specially built residential quarters (OMCT report 2008). Even though the farm became operational in 1998, the promises to the Adivasis were not fulfilled and 2002 onwards the Adivasi unrest began growing. The District collector promised appropriate action to comply with the promises. The college was officially inaugurated in 2004 without rehabilitating the 26
families evicted from the site. From 2006 onwards Adivasi protest became strong through public protest meetings with the support of Streevedi (A women’s rights NGO based in Calicut), Jananeethi (Human rights NGO based in Thrissur, Kerala), and Neethivedi (Women’s right NGO working among Adivasis in Wayanad). Thulsi vijayan the leader of the protest reported that the residential quarters built for Adivasis were allotted to college staff and the associate dean started harassing them through verbal abuse, threats and attacks on personal integrity. Thulsi organized a hunger strike and intensified their struggles and protest meetings from 2007 onwards even as the police harassed and intimidated the leaders and their families. Thulsi said that even though the High Court ordered to settle the matters favourable to the Adivasis, the college authorities have not complied with the conditions accepted at the time of transfer of 100 acres of land to the Veterinary College. Jananeethi reported that till June 2012 the matters were not settled, in favour of the Adivasis.

Priyadarshini Tea estate under Mananthavady Tribal Plantation Cooperative (MTPC) was one of the projects in Wayanad implemented to rehabilitate Adivasi labourers in 1989 by employing them as workers in the tea plantation and factory. By 1992, the plantations became fully functional and from 1998 onwards serious allegations of corruption were reported from the estate. There were also cases of Adivasis running away from the project. An earlier Mananthavady sub collector who was also holding the post of Managing Director of the estate recounted the rampant corruption. He reported,

In Priyadarshini estate starvation deaths were reported in 2005 and 2006 and I found the corruption details and the arbitrary financial decisions of the authorities that ultimately led to the starvation death of the poor Adivasi people in the estate. The net loss as on 31-3-2006 is reported as Rs. 4,25,03,425/- and this was due to corruption and mismanagement in buying green tea leaf for the factory. From the files, we found that no tender/quotation procedures were followed in deciding any of the sales/purchases in the estate. During that period from 2001 to 2005, no action was taken against the secretary even though the corruption history became public. Now the factory is running on profit and I could increase the bonus of the workers.

This sub-collector introduced the mid day meal scheme for the workers as a medical check up found them to be anemic. During his tenure, he initiated educational assistance to the workers’ children and started a nursery for tribal children. Job cards were ensured

61 For further details see also report send by Mr. Prasanth to the Registrar of Co operative Societies Thiruvananthapuram, E-5060/09 and Paniya Sadas Conference Paper, 2009 by local support team.
for availing NREGS work during lean seasons of employment in the tea garden. Housing programme for the workers was also in progress and 15 cents of land was allotted to each worker’s family. This sub-collector who was empathetic towards the Adivasi people and did whatever he could do was soon promoted and transferred to Thiruvananthapuram (Mathrubhumi, 3 March 2011).

All these projects envisioned by the State failed to consider the material and socio-cultural practices and aspirations of the Adivasis and became sites for their further alienation, dispossession and harassment. Even in the projects meant for them continuous resistance from Adivasis were required to achieve the minimum conditions for their survival and there was no political will to settle the matters.

**Kerala Scheduled Tribes (KST) Act and the Process of its Implementation**

In 1988 Dr. Nalla Thampy Thera, a Tamil born physician and a prominent fighter for Adivasi land issues from Sultan Bathery, Wayanad, filed a public interest litigation in the High court which demanded the enforcement of the KST Act of 1975. The High Court gave an order to the state government in 1993 to dispose the applications for restoration of land within six months. The Bill was passed in the Legislative Assembly. Meanwhile the Union Ministry of Welfare raised objections to the proposed provisions of the Bill. The Ministry was against the very purpose of the original Act of 1975 and it is not implemented till now according to the court order.

Geethanandan, a Dalit leader and supporter of Adivasi mobilisation recounted,

According to Article 744 of the Indian Constitution, in the Vth Schedule area and for all Scheduled Tribes even though they do not have Vth schedule, non-Adivasi people cannot buy Adivasi land and if it is sold, only Adivasis can buy it. And in Vth schedule area if there is government’s purampokku (public) land even that cannot be given to non-Adivasi people. On this basis, to fulfil a Constitutional responsibility, the 1975 KST Act was passed in Kerala and it has not been implemented effectively and even constitutional rights are denied to Adivasis. (Recent government circular is given in annexure).

He suggested that Supreme Court’s judgement of Samata in Andra Pradesh in July 1997, was a model to be followed in every state, which reminds the authorities that they should protect Adivasi rights over their lands62. In the Samata Judgement, the provisions

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62 In Samata Judgement the provisions of schedule V is also applied to the transfer of private or government land in schedule area to non-Adivasis. The relevant Andra Pradesh legislation read along with
of Schedule V are also applied to the restriction of transfer of private or government land in schedule area to non-Adivasis. However, in Kerala, no area has been declared as a ‘scheduled area’ and even after the state’s agreement with the Adivasis no declaration was made.

Analysing the implementation reveals that even a demand within the Constitutional provision has not been implemented according to the high court order but manipulated with various amendments.

While visiting the Revenue Department Office for collecting land details of Adivasis, Palu and Sharu from a Paniya family had come to the office to reacquire their alienated land under the provision of KST Act. Palu said,

I do not remember the exact year in which they have alienated us from our land. We do not have any record. Everything got burned. They have broken our houses and we had to come away. They sold that land to somebody else now.

One Revenue Department office staff also affirmed,

In the case of the Paniyas, there was no record of possession and so we are incapable of doing anything. Few Kurichia people were able to get back their alienated land.

The total number of claim applications received in Mananthavady RDO office, Wayanad was 2292 for restoration of alienated lands and the extent of land was 3443.49 acres. Out of these, applications for approximately 2500 acres of land were from the Kurichia community alone (Therakam 2009). According to Therakam’s study most of the land that was claimed by Adivasis today is in the possession of Hindus (66%). The remaining land was with Christians (22%) and Muslims (12%) and a negligible area (.74 %) in the

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Schedule V of the Constitution also prohibited transfer of land in Scheduled areas by way of a lease for mining purposes in favour of non-Adivasis. The court also ruled that 20 per cent of all profits, including past profits, accruing from privately run mines or industries set up in these territories to be “set apart” for Adivasis. It ordered the establishment of a committee, made up of senior government officials at the state level to consider the feasibility of permitting the industry to carry on mining operations and if necessary to place this before a Cabinet Sub-Committee to take appropriate action. The court held that similar committees should be set up in other states where similar acts do not totally prohibit granting mining leases of the lands in scheduled areas and also suggested that it would be useful for the Central government to take a policy decision and enact a suitable law in light of the courts guidelines to ensure a consistent scheme throughout the country in respect of Adivasi lands and mining (Facts against Myths, #2/2009 Vikas Adyayan Kendra, Information Bulletin)

63 Personal interview with Palan and Sarada at RDO office, Mananthavady, on 8/7/2010 seeking help to regain their land.
possession of other castes. This study challenges the finding of Centre of Excellence (2006), according to which Christian migrants had snatched away the Adivasi land. However, in Therakam’s study, the land occupied for charitable institutions was not included as it was not claimed by Adivasis. Even though there were Adivasis inhabiting those areas, they could not claim it back due to lack of record and Paniya people were the worst victims of such occupations according to the narratives of Adivasis and their empathisers.

The number of valid applications was 1563 after village level verifications and after applying the amendments of the Act the total cases to restore land from non-Adivasis were reduced to 11 cases claiming 35.33 acres and this reveals the failure of the implementation of the Act. 64 Sreerekha (2010) criticises the effort of the judiciary that insisted on alternate land for Adivasis and argues that the failure of the restoration of their alienated land compelled them to agree for alternate land.

The 1996 amendment of the KST Act legalised the land encroached upon during the period 1960-86, and those that did not exceed a hectare. Raman (2002) points out that majority of the lands alienated were less than a hectare in area and the greatest number of encroachments had occurred before the year 1986. The 1999 amendment legalised encroachments up to five acres and the land to be given to the Adivasi people is halved from more than two acres to one. According to the Act, if alienated land is developed by the encroacher, the expense amount has to be fixed by the RDO and that amount should be given back to the encroacher farmer. If there is no money with the Adivasi, the government will give it and the Adivasis have to pay back to the government. The process of KST Act implementation after amendments reveals the non-Adivasi inclination of the Act and in effect, Adivasis were denied of their rights even though alternate land distribution is in the process. According to Sreerekha (2010), the Supreme Court verdict of July 21, 2009 validated the 1999 Act and in the case of restoration of Adivasi land this judgement is a battle lost, legally.

From the files in Bathery taluk offices, it was evident that in most of the cases, the original ‘encroacher’ had sold the land to different individuals or divided it among their family members and the cases of more than two hectares in an individual’s name was

64 Mananthavady Revenue Department office files
very rare. Even though there is Constitutional protection against land alienation and the KST Act was passed to protect Adivasi land rights, during the process of implementation after the amendments, it was reduced to an act of giving compensation. When alternate land was given, they were actually displaced from their accustomed place to a different world and this has become a threat to their culture and livelihood. This indicates that the KST Act was not implemented to deal with the substantive issues in the everyday life of the Adivasi people.

Another recent government order related to land distribution was thoroughly criticised by Adivasi leaders. The specific statement in the order is given below.

In the G.O.(Ms) No.23/2010/SCSTDD (copy given in Annexure) regarding allotment of land-guidelines issued, it is stated that “The Government’s further order that the provisions of the Scheduled Tribes Assignment of Government Land Rules, 2001 shall be followed strictly in allotment of land to Adivasis, and specifically, that only landless Adivasis having no land in their name or of their spouse, having no right to any land, and whose annual income is below Rs. 30,000/-, shall be considered for allotment of land under the Adivasi Resettlement and Development Mission. It is further ordered that in case there are no Adivasis in a district fulfilling these criteria for allotment of land, eligible applicants from neighbouring districts be considered for allotment of land”.

According to government request, the Supreme Court had thrice extended the date in its order to distribute land to the Adivasis. As there was no way for the government to approach the court again for extension of date, with a government order they managed to select only the literally landless Adivasis not even having one cent, thereby avoiding the government promise of one acre to five acres of land to all Adivasis. C.K Janu and other Adivasi leaders in the area see this as a trick by the government to avoid the Adivasis who have a few cents of land. Janu questions the order by asking:

By choosing the people not even having one cent, are they giving land to those Adivasis who go for begging?

While seeing the condition of the Paniya colonies where houses are thickly packed within one or two cents of land, Janu’s question appears very relevant.
Further, according to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Development Department (G.O (Ms) No.9/2010/SCSTDD dated 8/2/2010) (copy given in Annexure), the empowered committee of the Adivasi Resettlement and Development Mission (TRDM) at its 20th meeting on 19-01-2010, had approved the proposal to acquire 1,000 acres of land in Wayanad for resettling Adivasi people at an approximate cost of Rs. 50 crores subject to the condition of plots for acquisition under the Fast Track. Based on the Government Order, the collector advertised for available lands. But there was no land available to purchase according to the fair value decided by the government. The District Collector quoted the market value as Rs. 8000/- per cent and it came to Rs. 8 lakhs per acre. But the fair value decided by the government in that area was much less and the project did not materialise.

One village officer stated that there were practical difficulties to move the land acquisition further even though they sent the report to the Collectorate regarding buying land in Thirunelly Panchayat. He mentioned,

Under Fast Track procedure government has no authority to acquire land for the fair value like the other government sanctioned projects. So unless there is an order to purchase land for market value, purchasing will not be possible.

Also the then functioning village officer shared that the fair value was decided by the government in 2005 and according to that, nobody was ready to sell their land and the purchasing was pending.

This reveals how the government policies itself became a stumbling block in the process of land distribution to the Adivasis. Also the process is getting delayed due to administrative apathy. In addition to this, as mentioned in the earlier section, the presence of land mafia and the booming real estate business in Wayanad also make buying land for Adivasi people a difficult task today.

The distribution of 5 to 10 cents of land after agreeing for 1 to 5 acres of land indicate that even now politicians and administrators tend to perceive that the Adivasis, specially the Paniyas need land only for housing and not for cultivation. On the contrary, the Adivasis’s narrations revealed their strong desire for land and its necessity for their material and cultural survival. The narrations of non-Adivasis revealed their vested interest to keep Adivasis as permanent landless labourers and dependents.
Ellan Mooppan from Thirunelli expressed his disgust about the land acquisition and distribution process in his panchayat,

During elections, party people said that they had bought land for us in Brahmagiri estate and Akkolly estate in Thirunelli Panchayat. But now the land purchasing and distribution process is blocked and till now, nobody among us has got land there. In Parison estate, few Paniyas and Urali Kurumas got 5 cents and a house. But where will they bury their dead? Where will they conduct their marriages and ritual celebrations? Providing us only one cent was not meant for our progress but for killing us by alienating us from our culture. Why is the government not keeping the promise of giving one acre land to every Adivasi? How many muthalalis (rich people) have unlawfully acquired government revenue land? If the Government is really interested in our life, they can reacquire those lands and give them to the Adivasis.

The District Collector reported,

There are roughly 8000 land less people among the Adivasis in Wayand. TRDM has sanctioned the project to buy land and from the total budget of Rs. 100 crores, Rs. 50 crores were given to Wayanad for purchasing land for Adivasis.

According to the Collectorate files for purchasing 424 acres, the procedures are over and the concerned authority has recommended it for final permission. However, on further enquiry with forest officials, it was revealed that there is conflict regarding the boundary of the land fixed for buying in Thirunelly for Adivasis with forest. The Forest Department raised objection in selling the decided plot as they found encroachment of forest by the concerned party and they did not provide No Objection Certificate (NOC) which is a prerequisite for selling it. The Paniyas and Kurichias in the study area informed that till March 2012, land was not purchased or distributed to the Adivasis.

Adivasi leaders expressed their discontent regarding the criteria of selecting only landless Adivasis to go to Aralam, as the agreement in 2001 promises one to five acres of land to all Adivasis. Adivasis expressed their difficulty many times when one family was selected from a settlement and asked to go to a distant place without promising continuous support. They had no wide social network and what was sustaining them was the community support at times of crisis.

Since there were only 308 landless Adivasi families in Kannur District and there was an approximate extent of 1100 acres (after keeping aside 3500 acres for the company) of land in Aralam farm, the TRDM chief requested the district collector (In response to a Writ Petition filed by Neethivedi on distribution of land to landless Adivasis) of Wayanad to select 800 landless and willing Adivasi families for allotment of land at Aralam,
Kannur District based on the High court judgement65. Preference was given to the landless Adivasi families at Mananthavady (TRDM circular is given in annexure). Thus, to allot land at Aralam applications with such criteria were invited and it was reported from the collectorate that among them very few were ready to go there. District collector reported,

   Even though 500 people are found eligible to receive land in Aralam farm they are not ready to go there. They do not want to get scattered from their community. They expect to get land in Wayanad district under some other scheme. So the 500 selected Adivasi families have not been rehabilitated till now (collectorate office files).

   It is evident that, to get Adivasis from the same area to go as a group, the criteria of selecting only the landless (zero land holding) has to be changed. It appears that the promises and procedures are just to pacify the Adivasis for the time being. If the officials are really interested, the whole colony (at least all those who have <5 cents) can be given land in the same area instead of selecting one or two from each colony to provide a sense of security and assurance to go and cultivate in the given land.

   However, Eva from Valli colony has a different experience to narrate,

   I have applied to get land in Aralam farm. Other than this small hut we have no space even to spit. I was not selected while distributing land in Aralam. When I asked the reason for not giving land, the tribal officer told that people who did not receive any help from the government till now is selected for giving land at Aralam. Later I came to know that people who were better off than me got selected for giving land at Aralam. That can be due to official or political preference.

   Eva’s narration reveals that the political and bureaucratic nexus exists in Wayanad even after the establishment of the Panchayati Raj system. She reported that there was disparity in the selection procedure and the oorukoottam has not been given any role in the decision regarding allotment of land in Aralam.

   According to the details collected from the office of the Wayanad Collectorate, the total number of records on land distributed were 4958. This include 364 pattas of assignment of surplus land, 3842 Record of Right (ROR) under Forest Rights Act, 51

65 The High court Judgment dated 22/06/2010; W. P(C) No.9148/10 had directed government to allot land to landless Adivasis of Kannoor from the rest of land earmarked in the Aralam Farm for settlement of Adivasis.
Bhupathivu pattas and 701 possession rights. Requests for category wise data and the details of extent of land distributed elicited the reply that data was not ready.

It is reported that most of the surplus land identified is under litigation with the plantation owners or rich landed class in Wayanad. Many of these litigations started in 1973 but without final verdict. The greatest number of land distribution was done under the Forest Rights Act 2006 and the following section delineates the processes and experiences of the Adivasis with regard to this.

**Forest Right Act 2006 and Present Scenario**

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) is a radical step which challenges the state ownership of forest and assigning community right to the Adivasis for the forest area they were using in the past. But this Act is not implemented in Kerala in its true spirit. Satyapalan (2010) points out that implementation of FRA in the Western Ghat region of Kerala ignored community rights and conservation provisions of the Adivasis even though Section 3 of the Act recognises the traditional forest rights of the communities. As individuals, they can use forest land for self cultivation, common occupation and habituation to ensure their livelihood. And at the community level, they can use forest land for collecting minor forest products, for fishing activities, seasonal grazing, access biodiversity and claim intellectual property rights over traditional knowledge and cultural diversity (ibid). Also FRA empowers the government to use forest land for building schools, anganwadis, dispensaries, fair price shops, electric and telecommunication lines and drinking water facilities (ibid).

According to the Act, the Gram Sabha is the authority to initiate the implementation process by constituting a Forest Rights Committee (FRC). First, the FRC clears the application after checking the nature and extent of individual and community right to be provided to the Adivasis under its authority. Their decisions are examined by the subdivisional level committee where tahsildar is the head and forwarded to the district level committee which is headed by the sub collector. In Satyapalan’s (2010) study, he stresses the need for sensitising communities to various provisions of the FRA legislation. His study reports that Adivasi promoters were recruited to the FRCs and were trained by the Kerala Institute for Research, Training and Development of Scheduled Castes and
Scheduled Tribes (KIRTADS), but they could not reach out extensively to the entire Adivasi areas of the state due to limited number of trained personnel, geographical challenges of operating in a hilly region and so on. He suggests that it is important to devise an effective mechanism to impart information about the FRA to the Adivasis so that they can articulate their rights.

According to one of the revenue officials at Mananthavady,

Kerala is a very individualistic state and even the Adivasis are interested in individual rights more than community rights. So in Kerala, the situation is not conducive for community rights. Also, they have not applied for community rights. Further, it is a new Act and the possibility of implementation is not ruled out completely. The demand for community rights may come soon and until the FRC passes community rights we cannot prove that they need community rights.

On enquiring about the possibility of a political party’s influence in not giving community rights, he jokingly replied, “Now the ruling party in Wayanad is the Communist Party and they should stand for community rights”.

The officials are placing the blame on the people even though they know that the Adivasis are not aware of the different provisions in the Act. This reveals their indifference to Adivasi culture which is rooted in community ownership and customary rights on the one hand, and their negligence to implement the Act in its original intent to reclaim Adivasi traditional rights over forests on the other. It is also evident that the officials have to obey the ruling party and its decisions in implementing the Act. The official indirectly points out that according to the ideology of the Communist Party, they should stand for community rights but avoid blaming them as being committed to the state. However, on different occasions, officials reported that the Adivasis hesitate to go to distant places even though land is offered for one or two individuals from a colony. The District Collector reported that many are hesitating to go to Aralam even though they are promised one acre of land there. It emerges that even now, they treasure community living and realise their need for each other especially at times of sickness and poverty. On the contrary, Non-Adivasis often comment that they live as a group in the colony, and this is why they remain ‘backward’ without evaluating what material resources they have for self development.
Few interviews and group discussions done in the Adivasi Bhumi Vitharana Pattayamela (Adivasi land distribution and title deed festival) site where land was distributed under FRA and other provisions conducted on December 19, 2009 near the Panchayat community hall Sulthan Bathery, Wayanad, (photo 36) revealed that Adivasis are not aware of the provision of community rights under FRA. Many of them were not aware about how much land they are entitled to and what rights are provided to them under FRA. They had not given applications for community right over forest due to their ignorance about the Act.

When asked for an explanation, an official who was responsible for land distribution under FRA for giving a minimum extent of land like 5 cents and 10 cents to the Adivasis mentioned,

The document can be given only for the land the Adivasis were using. Some of them showed only five cents, hence documents were given for five cents.

Anil, an Adivasi promoter in Ward 2 of Thirunelli Panchayat, reported,

In Thirunelli Panchayat, the government had distributed Kaivasarekha (Record of Right) to around 264 Adivasis according to the government record. But the extent of land given ranges from 2 cents to 1 acre. In my ward, 3 people got land and it was 3 cents, 5 cents and 10 cents respectively. Most of the Adivasis got less than 30 cents and very few got 1 acre. Though up to 10 acres can be given to the Adivasis according to the Act, this was not followed as they have no proof of identity to show that they used more land in the past.

According to FRA, Adivasis can get land up to 4 hectares and when it came to implementation, the extent reduced drastically. Satyapalan’s (2010) study also points out that Adivasi communities in Wayanad are given only small plots of land which fall below the one acre promised to them. Even though he notes that on an average they received 30 cents of land, in the study area and in the Pattayamela (title deed festival) held in December 2009, the land given mostly fell under very small measures beginning from 2 cents as mentioned above.

One village officer in the study area stated,

They have given huge publicity and advertisement in the newspapers saying that they are conducting Pattayamela 66, though they were giving only Record of Right (ROR). This was
real cheating. One Adivasi approached me with the ROR to pay the tax. I revealed that they cannot pay tax with this record and then he got disappointed and realised the futility of the record. Also there was no possibility of getting bank loan or loans from other economic institutions. This will not even help them to take bail from court. With this record they could make a shed and live in that area.

It is observed that in the document ‘Record of Right’ provided to the Adivasis does not mention any of their rights over the forest such as the right to collect forest products and to conserve the biodiversity of the area as mentioned in the Forest Rights Act 2006. Thus in effect ‘Adivasi colonies’ are created in the midst of forest instead of ‘Adivasi villages’ and Forest Department continue to be the sole authority of the forest.

Table 8.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details of Claims and Land Distribution in Wayanad under FRA 2006</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of claims received as on 14-9-2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of claims cleared by Forest Right Committee as on 14-9-2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of claims cleared by subdivisional committee as on 14-9-2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of claims cleared by District level committee as on 14-9-2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of ROR issued so far</td>
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Source: Sub collectors office Mananthavady, Tribal Development office, Kalpetta

According to the Tribal Development Department report, in Kalpetta, Wayanad the number of RORs given was 3842 (collected in the year 2011). In this file, there was an indication of 494 community claims. However, there was no indication of clearing these claims by the committees or issuing of ROR. When the officer in special charge of issuing ROR was asked about the provision of community rights to the Adivasis in the Act, he said that there were 13 cases in which they had given permissions like building an

that why Adivasis are not given one acre, they answered that this is good land and how can we give patta for more than 15 cents. Adivasis received ROR for forest land. From a random interview conducted in the ‘mela ground’ it is revealed that the Adivasi people were ignorant about the ROR and how much land they are getting. Also, the record prepared in English was not explained to them (Interview and discussion conducted on December 19, 2009, Bathery panchayat community hall during the patta distribution).
anganwadi, making roads, house electrification, using the river close to them etc. However, community rights include collection of minor forest products, protecting forest, accessing biodiversity and intellectual property rights over traditional knowledge and cultural diversity etc. and on probing about these, he said that in the present situation in Kerala, community rights cannot be issued. However, in the central evaluation report, there was no mention of these 494 claims for community rights in the forest, and they just mentioned that community rights in the forest are not implemented in Kerala and that the Adivasis are not aware of community rights. Then what about those 494 claims, who were aware and who had applied?

A few Kurichias in the study area they reported that the party nominates Forest committees and decides the modalities and allotment of the Forest Right. Generally there were no gram sabha meetings at panchayat level and hamlet level to select FRC’s. That means the authorities have violated Rule 3 of the Rules and of Section 6 (1) of the Forest Right Act 2006 and section 2(g) and 2(p) of the same.

One Adivasi promoter in Thirunelli Panchayat reported,

In my ward, forest committees were selected by the oorukottam. All of them were wage labourers and had no time to contribute to the FRCs. If their signature was needed, we had to go to their houses and get it done. Actually they had to show the land and decide the areas which were utilised by Adivasis when surveyors came to measure forest land for giving records. But that process was not happening and decisions were taken by the tribal department and forest department. In one area, it was difficult to give land as there was some conflict with wild life areas.

A Kurichia, state ST advisory board member reported,

The Forest Rights Bill was passed in 2006. But the state government was inactive for a long period. When the state government got an order in 2009, pointing out that strong action would be taken if it was not implemented within six months, they called all ST state advisory board members and discussed the FRA. Then government entrusted an IAS officer to implement it within six months and they had implemented it partially. If there was no compulsion from the centre, they could not have done it. However, this is not done in a democratic way. Party supporters were chosen to give records and they occupied vested forests and reserved forests in many places without distributing it in a transparent way to the people who lived there. In Pozhuthana Panchayath, Idiyam vayal one family was residing in the forest for long. But the party people destroyed his hut and cultivation and deprived him of land as he was affiliated to a different party.

The above descriptions indicate the partiality and lawlessness in implementing the much appreciated FRA. Janu the Adivasi leader, pointed out,
In the Madhava Menon Commission Report recommendations, 50 percent of the vested forest was meant for landless Adivasis for doing cultivation according to the Kerala Private Forest Vesting and Assignment Act 1971. In the agreement with AGMS, then Chief Minister, A.K Antony reaffirmed that the state government would take measures to identify and distribute the maximum extent of land especially vested forest land, to rehabilitate the Adivasis with the consent of the union government. 25,000 acres of land was earmarked for Adivasi people by the committee and this could have been enough to rehabilitate the landless Adivasis. However, this did not materialise because of vested interests.

The government appointed Madhava Menon Committee affirmed the presence of a large number of settlements of Adivasis in vested forests and recommended that the Adivasis be given their land (Prakash 2002). The total extent of vested forest reported by the Madhava Menon Committee was 169411.84 hectares and the vested forest specially earmarked for Adivasis was 23058.63 hectares. The vested forest found in Wayanad alone was 11082.02 hectares (26679.671 acre) (ibid). As mentioned in Chapter IV, instead of receiving the record for 50 percent of vested forest, they even lost their land which they were using as their own without any record. This clearly reveals the land politics in Wayanad and the hold of plantation owners, Jenmis and companies even in the Supreme Court to produce orders in their favour overriding the livelihood rights of Adivasis. Thus, it is evident that after independence, the land mafia and planters worked against Adivasi land rights and they kept the Adivasis away from acquiring a piece of land. However, the government has not taken measures to distribute at least the remaining area to the Adivasis even after the agreement with AGMS or during the implementation of the Forest Right Act of 2006.

It is surprising to note that the rights guaranteed by the government nearly four decades ago through the Private Forest Vesting and Assignment Act (High Court approved but defeated in the Supreme Court) are further defeated when officials decided to give meager measures of land to Adivasis according to FRA. Now the objection is not only from planters and Jenmis but also from the Forest Department and thus indirectly from the state itself. One Village officer said,

In a few places like Thirunelli Mallika colony, only the house is given to them. The local leaders asked the Adivasis to demand more land but the forest department raised an objection.

67 Forest land was taken away from private land owners and vested it in the government by abolishing the private forest law.
The Report of Visit of National Forest Rights Committee (2010) points out that when a few Adivasis objected and refused to receive the title deed for small areas, the Adivasi affairs Minister after having a discussion with the Revenue, Forest and Adivasi Departments announced that every individual should be given one acre of land. The Adivasis submitted revised applications and in some cases tried to encroach one acre and it created a clash with the forest officials. Even after the announcement, there were difficulties in implementation because of the objection of local forest officials. Further, when this process began, a writ petition was filed in the High Court by Wayanad Prakruthi Samrakshana Samiti (WPSS) in the name of conservation of forest. As a result, the High Court issued an order to restrain this development and directed the state government not to consider the revised applications and not to permit encroachment. Even during the Muthanga strike, the environmentalists in Wayanad were against the Adivasis. As Baviskar (1997) points out, when studying development projects, environmental sociology has devoted less attention to the plight of Adivasis and such oppressed groups are not counted as the subjects of environmental sociology.

However, WPSS and the investigating authorities forget that many of the younger Adivasi generation may not know how much land their ancestors had been using, as the forest department installs jendas and trenches and make new demarcations at regular intervals. Also it is a relevant question to explore why the forest department and WPSS have been joining hands to stall the distribution of land to the Adivasis. In Muthanga, they objected to the occupation of land by Adivasis by arguing that it was reserved forest even though it was the dwelling place of the Adivasis according to Adivasi narratives. When they were given land according to the Forest Right Act and by Ministers Special Order, WPSS could not freeze the process. It was evident that, the Adivasi’s right to possession may contest the FD’s authority in controlling forest resources in the name of preservation and the environmentalist’s concern for preserving forests. However, this conflict has to be analysed in the context of international environmental protection initiatives and their argument for including corporate investment in forest management and development. The Forest Department and Wild Life Trust of India supported by a UK based NGO, secured land for elephant corridor project in Wayanad and people were already evicted from Pulayankolly, Thirulukunnu and Valia emmidi under this project.
The Adivasi families rehabilitated under this project in Panavally conveyed their grievances about their badly constructed houses and small plots of land.

However, when the central committee came for evaluation, they were happy about the procedure followed in Kerala in implementing FRA. But, the entire report reveals that it was not evaluated from the Adivasi’s point of view, their experience and its benefit to them, even though there were attempts to report people’s grievances. It was appreciated for the rigorous procedure of giving training to the personnel in Adivasi departments, survey and settlements, forest and revenue to go through the process for implementation systematically (National Forest Rights Committee Report 2010). There was appreciation for survey and demarcation using “Total station survey instrument” and the ROR issued with a proper surveyed sketch of the individually occupied land. There is not even a single instance in Kerala, where community forests have been demarcated and plotted and the traditional right to forest resources has been given to the Adivasi people (ibid). The Central Committee also reported that non-settlement of community right is contradictory to the directions issued by the Ministry of Adivasi Affairs but not pointed out as a major flaw in the implementation. However, the evaluation report gives thrust to the technical and administrative process rather than the outcome and how it benefited the Adivasis.

One Adivasi promoter from Thirunelly Panchayat reported,

The Forest department is giving priority to send Adivasis out of forest and they sent out Adivasis from Kambilikkappu, Pulayankolly, Tholpetty and Nedunthana. According to FRA, they can be given up to 10 acres if they traditionally owned it for any purpose. They are told that if they apply for land using FRA they will not be given land outside and instead if they come out from the forest they are tempted with promises of 30 cents of fertile land and good houses outside.

As depicted in this section, according to the FRA, the Adivasis were not given patta or the right to self determination and self management of the area they used traditionally through community right. Some officials see it as positive, as Adivasis might again lose the land if they were given the original patta as it could be acquired by other vested

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68 Report of Visit of National Forest Rights Committee Team to Kerala. Date’s of visit: July 2-5, 2010. (It is mentioned in the report that this report is written for the purpose of the committee’s ongoing work; any views contained in this are not necessarily those of the entire committee and are not to be taken as final views or recommendations by the committee).
interest groups with record and this would again lead to alienation. However, this was against what was envisioned in the Act and it was advisable to enforce strict laws to prevent alienation rather than avoid giving patta. Besides, they neglected the fact that even for getting credit from the Bank to develop the land, they needed a patta and it was necessary when government support was reported to be nil to develop the land. It was becoming more evident that giving land to Adivasis was objected historically and the change was only in the groups such as jenmis, planters, companies, different vested interested lobbies or the state itself according to each context. The recent land occupation and encroachments by different Adivasi organisations are delineated to understand the context.

Adivasis Collective Responses

The Adivasis have organised under Adivasi Kshema Samithi (AKS), a CPI (M) party oriented Adivasi organisation and are now engaged in land struggle and ‘symbolic acquisition’ of land for Adivasis by occupying and erecting huts in surplus lands, revenue lands and vested forests.

The AKS became popular among Adivasis as they became very organised and active after Muthanga land struggle by promising land to the Adivasis. There were arguments that CPM facilitated the formation of AKS since they didn’t want to lose their followers to Gothra Mahasabha formed under the leadership of C K Janu in 2001. The party support gave them partial assurance against the police brutality during the protests. However, it is reported by the Adivasis that CPI (M) leaders publicly criticised the leaders who fought for Adivasi land right at Muthanga and even used video CDs showing them cheating the Adivasis in order to defame their leadership. The Adivasis also narrated many experiences to show the party’s preference for its supporters, while ignoring others.

In Kunnil colony, a few Paniyas shared their experience,

We were called to a site where they promised us land, but were asked to get letter from the party office. The party office refused to give the letter saying that we are not participating in party meetings. Then we challenged them, “Now do not come to our colony asking for our votes”.

This indicates that the main concern of the political parties is not securing Adivasi life by giving them land but strengthening their party membership. The Adivasis criticised the
party for selecting only party people for benefits and making villages into party villages. In 2007, MLA Kunjiraman from Kurichia community said that they have occupied land in 16 spots amounting to 6970 acres of land. However, while visiting and talking with the people settled in S Valavu and Panavally where AKS captured land with CPI (M) support, the Paniyas had a lot of grievances. In many places they had not settled well and lacked minimum basic facilities, ration cards, opportunities for wage labour and so on. In 2010, in these two places, they distributed ROR but many people were left out. However, eviction from the occupied areas by the government also achieved momentum during this period. Also according to C.K Janu, these are vested forests and project land which were earmarked for the Adivasi people and promised to them during the agreement with government in 2002.

AKS and Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Union (KSHTU) together occupied 3 acres and 70 cents of land in Karakkuni in Edavaka panchayat. The Adivasis were found enthusiastic to go with the AKS even though the extent of land promised was meagre. To the question, why they were not demanding one acre, Girijan from Kunnil colony said,

The Party encroached the land and they are giving it to us. We have no authority to say that we need more. Even if it is five cents, let it be, it is their mercy towards us.

Their crucial need for land made them agree to go on a strike for getting even 5 cents and not seeing it as their right but the party’s might.

However, Mananthavady tahasildar reported,

The land at Karakkuni was already given to five Adivasis in the notification 76/November and now they are not keeping that land. Nobody in that locality knows about the real owners of the 3.70 acres of land there.

When Adivasis were promised one acre of land, taking 60 families to a place where only 3.70 acres of land was available was not justifiable. Further, it was under somebody else’s possession and there was no surety of the occupants receiving the relevant records. From Kunnil colony all of them joined this strike. It was at a walkable distance from their

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69 MLA reported the 16 spots they encroached. S. Valavu (Thavinjal) 300 acres, Panavally (Thirunelli) 65 acres, Poralom -240 acres, Edamunda (Thondarmadu) 400 acres, Nellickachal- 60 acres, Perumkulan (Vellamunda) 140 acres, Muttil-300 acres, Nathamkuni-400 acres, Meppady -600 acres, Idiyamvayal (Pozhuthana) 800 acres, Kuttiyamvayal (Padinjarathara) 1100 acres, C.C Kavala (Meenangady)- 400 acres, Appadu (Meenangady)- 600 acres, Mariyanadu (Pulpally) 1500 acres, Banglamkunnu (Edavaka) -25 acres, Thettamala (Thondarmadu) – 40 acres. (These may not be exact measures as the interviewee has recollected these from memory and given in writing on a paper).
colony and all those who were landless in their settlement were offered land and they were enthusiastic even though the area was small. Besides, they could come back to their original settlement without much expense.

The whole area was filled with red flags (photo 35) and a party member explained,

Adivasis are attracted towards red flag. Each one was asking for a red flag. A Paniya Mooppan expressed his last wish in the hospital to be buried in the *samarabhumi* (land where he participated in struggle) and the party people were called to the hospital. The revolutionary red spirit attracted them more than the offer of a piece of land. When that spirit dies they go away. I can bet, if you come to this place after six months there will be only a few families.

On the contrary, Nima from Kunnil colony stated,

For getting land we will go with any party. Now the Left Party is taking the initiative to capture land for us. So we are with them. Otherwise we will have to stand with BJP. Actually, lotus is our symbol, and we also come under Hindus. For the previous election, the Marxist party did not give me a seat to contest the election. So I stood for election with the BJP. Even though I lost the election, I learned many things. This time the Left Party may give me a seat to contest in the election and I will join them.

This clearly indicates that she has no strong loyalty to any particular party or blind attraction towards the red flag. At the same time, she showed shrewdness to choose different parties by practically assessing which party does at least the minimum favour to their community. In an interview, Adivasi leader C.K Janu also expressed that Adivasis are not supporters of CPI (M) and that their party politics were unknown to Adivasis; but when the Party went on a strike to increase the wages, the Adivasis thought they are people who solve practical issues and stood with them (Interview by Rekharaj 2008).

As the CPI (M) member said, while visiting the site after six months there were only around fifteen families out of the 60 families who had erected temporary sheds and occupied the land in Karakkuni. However, the reason for leaving was not because they had lost interest in the land but due to traumatic conditions as explained by the Adivasis who stayed back. They had no water facility. The well close to them built by the block panchayat was taken over by a non-Adivasi family who did not allow the Adivasis to draw water after 5’o clock in the evening knowing that they came back at 5 pm after their wage labour. Many of them also got sick during the heavy rains as the temporary shed did not give them enough protection. They mentioned that if they were not continuously...
staying in the area and did not participate regularly in the party committee meetings, they had no guarantee to get Kaivasarekha.

There was strong criticism against CPI (M) party that they were supporting AKS, which is their own foster party organisation. But one KSSP member supported CPI (M) saying that,

The Left Party was organising and leading the struggle. So the supporters of left party joined them first for the struggle and they were naturally getting land. However, their genuine issue was addressed in the struggle and that had to be appreciated. This struggle is only to point out to the government that there is land available to give to the Adivasis and to bring the Adivasi land issue to the forefront. This symbolic struggle was to create a greater thrust upon the government to give land to all Adivasis.

CPI (M) claimed that the state government had formed a tribunal to resolve the land issues of the Adivasis and Kaivasarekha (Record of Rights) was distributed to many Adivasis who encroached upon the land under the leadership of AKS and thus contributed to the struggle. The police cases against people involved in struggle in Ambukuthy and Muthanga for a piece of land was pending, though during the elections, the CPI (M) promised to release them all if they came to power (Refer to Ambukuthi and Muthanga struggle in Chapter 4). However, this indicated that Adivasis could only proceed through the party. Any self effort would be blocked and punished and they have to bear the long term consequences of their resistance on their own.

When Adivasis organised under AKS, the Congress party and other Non-governmental Organisations (NGO) also formed their supportive Adivasi wings like Adivasi Congress and Adivasi Forum respectively. While Adivasi Congress claimed to develop leadership among Adivasis, Adivasi Forum organised land struggles.

However, the Adivasi Forum took the land issue seriously and conducted struggles to distribute Beenachi estate in Bathary Taluk to the Adivasis. This land was owned by the Government of Maharashtra and the Adivasis demanded that the Government of Kerala buy it and distribute it to them, as this plantation was dysfunctional for long and the neighbours were looting the produce from this estate.

The leaders of Adivasi Forum expressed their reason for organising Adivasis as Janu’s (the Adiya leader who organised Adivasis for land strikes) silence and inaction. Also the Forum had a difference of opinion with the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha.
regarding emphasis on Gothra (clan) identity. Instead of keeping a gothra identity or caste identity, they preferred to have a pan Adivasi identity for fighting for their social issues and with this intention they organised the Adivasi Forum. According to them, as the atrocities on Adivasi communities after Muthanga were treacherous, they gathered inspiration to begin an Adivasi Forum, to relieve them from their traumatic experience.

Political parties as well as NGOs criticised Janu’s inaction. However, a journalist’s comment is revealing,

There is no meaning in saying that Janu is silent. She cannot fight against a party so powerful and involved in propaganda against her. Also she was caught up with too many cases related to Muthanga issue and she is actually a victim of law and order. Janu is an organic leader from her own community and those who favour Adivasis have to support her leadership instead of making rival groups and scattering the Adivasi energy.

Janu also refuted the criticism leveled against her by pointing out “We are protesting now by building huts wherever land is available. We built huts in Aralam when land was not provided as promised and government is forced to distribute title deeds. People see only crowds and noise as protest” (Interview by Rekharaj 2008).

Political parties started organising Adivasi people around the land issue, by including it in the election agenda and assuring them land. However, their strength was scattered due to the formation of different groups fighting with each other. The land issue of Adivasis became a political subject that could not be neglected completely in Wayanad as they have 17 per cent representation in the district unlike other districts in Kerala. Also, the initiative for land distribution to the Adivasis was forced as an outcome of their responses to development through different land struggles. One village officer said, “The reason for party initiated encroachment is the fear that Adivasis may otherwise go behind Janu the Adivasi leader”.

As delineated above, the lack of transparency and motivation of the government and different organisations in distributing land was questioned thoroughly by the Adivasis and their empathisers. Ammini narrated,

After the Ambukuthi struggle, the government promised to distribute land for the landless and they had collected applications from 500 families. We all went and signed the application forms in the village and they informed that every family was to be given one acre
of land in Aralam farm. They promised that each plot will be numbered and the numbers will be distributed on the 17th of that month. But the number and 17th has not yet come.

In another case, Vasan, a Paniya from Kunnil was furious when he was called from the work place to go to the court for trial for participating in the Ambukuthi land strike which happened almost two decades ago. Every month they had to appear before the court, pay fees to the lawyer and the promise of releasing the strikers was postponed indefinitely. Recently (in June 2012), Chunda and Unni from the study area were called to appear before the court and they had to pay Rs. 500 to the lawyer.

The previous CPI (M) government was out of office before fulfilling the promise of purchasing land for the Adivasis as well as acquiring surplus and untitled land for distribution. The subsequent United Democratic Front (UDF) government completed two years and the 50 crores entrusted to buy land for Adivasis has still not been utilised. Instead as the newspaper Malayala Manorama (May 31, 2012, page 4) reported, 115 strikers were arrested and removed from the Pilakkavu land struggle site. Representatives from Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha, Adivasi Kshema Samithi, Adivasi Forum, Adivasi Congress, SC/ST co-ordination committee, Adivasi Sangham and Vanvasi Vikas Kendra participated in the discussions to deal with Adivasi land issues and a four member sub-committee including Adivasi Minister P.K Jayalakshmi was formed (June 15, 2012). Again Malayala Manorama (20 June, 2012) reported the pathetic condition of Adivasi strikers at Cheeyambam where temporary sheds were damaged in the rain and people were under threat of infectious diseases. The report said that in Cheeyambam, Moonnanakkuzhy areas, thousands of families were on struggle and that jails became full with protesters. Thus arresting and removal of those on struggle was also becoming impossible.

Even amidst extreme suffering from court cases and arrests, the occupation by Adivasis continued. The Paniyas were reported to be at the forefront of these struggles

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70 132 families entered into that area and built sheds and they were harassed by police and forest department and arrested. Even though it happened 16 years back some of us are under trial even now. Whenever we are called to the court we have to leave our wage labour and have to be present in the court. And if one person could not report on time due to any reason they will postpone the hearing and send us back giving another date. This is the fate of land cases in which Adivasis are accused (Interview with Chantha and Nima from Kunnil colony).
being the most deprived and marginalised due to landlessness. For acquisition of land they were ready to join with any party or organisation and very recently (2012) the Paniyas in the study area reported that they occupied land in Bathery-Moornanakkuzhy; Pulpally - Cheeyambam and, Mananthavady - Thalappuzha and Pilakkavu. They reported that their children were not able to go to school and that families were suffering due to poverty and there was nobody to bail them out. Their reason for intensifying the struggle was inaction and indifference from government and administrators.

In the specific settlements selected, there were no landless Kurichias but while visiting the occupied areas, there were Kurichias who occupied land but they kept regular contact with their people to access support, unlike the Paniyas who lacked minimum resources to survive in their own colonies as well as in the new place. Since, the land distribution did not consider the community and cultural right of Adivasis, often this prompted Paniyas to leave the new land and come back to their kith and kin as they lacked any support system in the new place. Thus, the process of land distribution began in bits and pieces revealing another fact that state and administrative bodies were ignoring the Adivasi concept of relationship with land, their culture and customary rights and their agricultural practices and survival. It also emerges that political parties are more interested in fulfilling the party agenda than helping Adivasis to occupy land and earn a livelihood.

**Adivasis View of Land Centered Development**

According to Adivasi perception, land is at the centre of their development agenda and is the most neglected concept in state initiated development. As discussed earlier, all the commons are ‘enclosed’ by the state and private enterprises and Adivasis lost their resources for livelihood one by one. Adivasi mobilisation very forcefully proclaimed a different self developmental perspective which is rooted in land and its resources, ecologically sound agricultural practices and self determination. Adivasi leaders expressed a clear division between their way of seeing land and the nature around as the dwelling place of their gods, as sacred places and the modern perception of seeing it as a commodity.
Ecologically Sound Agricultural Practices

The ecological philosophy of co-existence with nature can be seen among them today even in the midst of threat to their survival. For instance, they avoid collecting herbs in their reproductive season, they keep enough honey for the bees in the bee hive to raise their young, they will not destroy the soil with fertilisers even at the risk of loss in agriculture, they hunt the weakest animal by giving signal through the ritual called nayakettal (making loud noises before they and their dogs enter the forest) for the stronger ones to escape (photos). Their belief that they are only caretakers to protect earth for their community and for the future generation is reflected in their narrations and actions. On the contrary, the colonisers converted this relationship into a commercial relationship making land and its resources into a commodity and the process of alienation was accelerated for Adivasi communities. For the government, the forest has its worth for its resources and for revenue but for the Adivasis it is subsistence, leisure and a source of spiritual awakening. The Adivasis generally hold this deeper meaning of relationship with land when they talk about their communal rights over lands. Their ‘development’ concept as well as livelihood is strongly related to land, its resources and its sustainable use. The sustainable use of land is a value for them even when they see the tendencies of commercialisation around them. This is an important demarcation that Adivasi culture put forward in its critique of current ‘development’. But the invasion of modern notions of development sidelines the subsistent technologies of Adivasis. Janu maintained,

We moved according to nature’s clock or a biological cycle and only took things which do not hurt the earth. The poomi-thai (land-mother) relationship is interwoven in our culture and we firmly believe that we are part of the earth and earth is part of us.

Most of the Paniyas and Kurichiyas also expressed the same reverence to nature and their rituals begin with adoring the earth and its four directions.

Contemporary global discourse focusses on the environmental crisis and the threat to human survival on planet earth. Bolan, an Adivasi leader from Paniyan community stated,

The environmental crisis is due to human greed and the Adivasis show a way forward to protect the earth. Adivasi culture protects and sustains the whole earth and its people, all nature and soil. Therefore, I suggest that all people should learn Adivasi culture. When people learn and become part of that culture, automatically nature and earth will be sustained. When nature and earth are protected, our generation and the coming generations
will become healthy. When Adivasis are given one to five acres of land they start cultivating food crops in it without using fertilisers. Now we will not eat if rice and vegetables are not imported from other states. When Adivasis are given land, our self sustained villages will come back to existence.

An integral part of liberalisation has been commercial exploitation of land and its natural resources. The expansion of cash crops has led to rapid growth of commercialisation of agriculture and monetisation of the economy of the region. The introduction of cash crops, new seed varieties, fertilisers, machinery and irrigation technology were changes seen in the study area. Commercial orientation of land use pattern and introduction of cash crops affected the availability of land to Adivasis for their mixed cultivation practices and subsistence based on that. The Kurichias used plenty of land for their food production, but this has dwindled today because of commercialisation.

Even now, a clear division exists in the non-Adivasi and Adivasi perception and experience regarding land. For the non-Adivasi, land and nature have been free goods to be appropriated and manipulated for making maximum profit. They believe in the capitalist mode of production. On the contrary, the Paniyas as well as Kurichias are interested mainly in subsistence production. They give priority to food crop production than to cash crops and they avoid chemical fertilisers and pesticides and follow traditional methods to save the crop from pest attack. A Kurichia Karanavar put it in perspective and challenged the alienating nature of modern agriculture by saying, “Agriculture cannot be counted as a profit making business, or cannot be counted as loss. It is part of our culture and it has to give us satisfaction more than material benefit.”

Eran, a Kurichia elder reported,

We were mostly producing ragi, china and cahama in the hill slopes and forest and when the migrants from Thiruvithamkur came they produced theruvappullu (lemon grass), cashew, coffee, pepper, rubber etc. We got loan for cultivating cashew plants, rubber etc. I cultivated cashew in my land. Now it is not giving yield due to some pest attack and I have no other way to earn a livelihood. Also Krishibhavan distributed chemical fertilisers and pesticides and encouraged farmers to use it by giving it at subsidised rates. Even the banana plants, arecanut tree plants and cashew plants are provided by the agricultural office. Even though people around us convert all their paddy fields to banana and arecanut for profit, we will do paddy cultivation as part of our tradition.

Eran’s narrative reveals that state policies as well as migration of non-Adivasis forced them to change from their subsistent food crop cultivation to cash crops. Aiyappan and Mahadevan (1990) pointed out that the cultivation of oil producing grass throughout
Wayanad by the migrants affected the entire ecological set up of this hilly district. However, large scale oil grass cultivation is stopped due to scarcity of forest based fuel (ibid).

Kurichias also reported that Agricultural Department had started giving them new paddy seed varieties like Athira, Jaya etc. instead of their traditional varieties. The Government had given incentives and fertilisers to encourage Puncha Krishi (second crop of paddy) and taught them to use chemical fertilisers. Even though they were against using chemicals, they slowly realised that quick yield was necessary for their next cultivation to start on time and a small amount of fertiliser was necessary for double cropping. Other circumstances which forced them to use fertilisers in small amounts was the fear of pest attack in their field since new seeds were not resistant to pest attack. Also as all others around them used fertilisers and pesticides to protect their crops there was more chance of pest attack in their field. Amidst all these compelling circumstances to use chemicals and pesticides, there were tharavads that preferred to stick to their traditional practices and values and used only natural methods for controlling pest attacks using branches of karpuram (cinnamomum camphora).

Manjan from Tulsi tharavad recounted,

We used to do the paddy husking by ourselves and used to add the husk in the paddy fields. We also added leaves and ashes according to the corresponding seasons. In the past, the straw we used for roofing the house was used as manure when it got old. Today there is no place for rearing cattle, since we lost the forests and have partitioned our property among the members of the tharavad.

Since the slash and burn cultivation was banned they could not do ragi cultivation in the forest land. It was observed that a few of them cultivated ragi in very small measures in their paddy fields. They reported that there was no support or incentive from the government to preserve their rich cultivation practices in their traditional ways which were eco friendly.

Maani from Champa colony says, “Land loses its ghee if we use chemical fertilisers” which meant that land loses its organic fertility if we use chemicals.

Velan from a Kurichia tharavad narrated another story of exploitation of the land,
Since we have taken loans from the bank and we were not able to pay them back within the stipulated time, we gave our paddy fields on lease for ginger cultivation to the non-Adivasi people. The non-Adivasi people used so much urea and salt that they got a good yield but the fertility of the land was destroyed. We planted banana and paddy after that but the yield was poor. Now we have to put cow dung and leaves to bring it to the original form and have to wait for three years for good yield.

A Kurichia youth said,

My non-Adivasi friends call me a fool and advise me to add some chemical fertiliser and make some profit when I cultivate paddy. The modern trends are tempt us to leave our traditional values as we cannot survive with our old traditional ways.

The continuous contact with the non-Adivasis bring slow changes in them but those who are using chemicals also use it less compared to the non-Adivasis.

The Adivasis are aware of how non-Adivasis use development schemes. Lampan (45) from the Paniya community narrated an incident. The non-Adivasis staying in the hill opposite their colony had made pits in their land for water harvesting and they collected money for soil and water conservation from the agricultural department. However, after some time, they planted banana plants in the same pits and converted the soil management programme into a profit making venture totally uncaring for the earth. He commented, “Human beings are intelligent creatures, but if they use their intelligence to do harm to the earth it will get destroyed”.

These narratives of the Adivasis indicate not only their wisdom and belongingness to the land but of the non-Adivasi communities greed to extract maximum profit within a short period depriving both the land as well as the future generation. According to Josavic and Shanmuga Ratnam (2007), Adivasi communities are self sustaining communities and in their world view, the socio-economic security of the individual was intimately bound to the collective security of the community. As Bijoy (2001) points out, there still exist the negative stereotyping of the sustainable subsistence economy of the Adivasis. He stresses the significance of the Adivasi subsistence economy in the midst of a profit oriented economy. According to him, the disregard for their culture is based on the wrong perception that production of surplus is more important than the social reproduction in co-existence with nature.

Adivasi leader Janu and many of the Kurichia and Paniya leaders expressed the indigenous concern of healing the earth and its people through sustaining nature’s wealth
and through subsistence agriculture, without polluting the earth through chemical use. They expressed that their respect for nature and its resources and their experiential knowledge about nature were seldom recognised by the administrators and development planners and were often described as backwardness. According to Pathy (1998), the contemporary imposition of the supposedly universal model of development and the consequent dispossessment of Adivasi communities has been built on the unequal socio-political structure, both at the national and global levels.

The Adivasis have been living a life of subsistence believing in the reproductive value of land more than extracting from it for commodity production and profit. Even in their tryst with modernity, majority of them treasure their values and are engaged in agriculture and collection of its produce in subsistent ways. O’Connor (1998) discusses the ecological crisis and destruction of subsistence oriented economies in the context of modern capitalist development, which is useful to understand the Adivasi context in Wayanad. He has incorporated culture and nature in his conceptualisations of forces of production and relations of production, however he does not engage with the cultural critique of superiority assigned to modernity. Appadurai (1990) points out that the core values of sociality existing among communities have been threatened by the commercialisation of agriculture. He explains the processes which divorce agriculture from agricultural relationships in the current commercial trend of maximising output and profit and draw a person away from the social demands of village life.

In this regard, Jacob (2006) criticises the organised move to promote organic farming as it does not benefit people. He points out that only duly certified farms by donor agencies and NGOs will be acceptable as organic farms and obtaining certificates is not economical. He points out that the common man becomes a victim of these sophisticated patterns of development and a few elite accrue to these church sponsored or NGO sponsored ventures. However, indigenous practices of cultivation are very much organic in nature and it was the Adivasi tradition from the beginning, but there has been hesitation to give credit to the Adivasis or promote it among them when it achieved a scientific rationality. Both the Paniya and the Kurichia communities held strongly to the practice of organic farming (Paniyas if they have a small piece of land) and fought against neo liberal tendencies in agriculture in their everyday agricultural practices, but they have been
branded as ‘backward’. However, the Adivasis are aware of the appropriation of their philosophy and culture of agriculture.

The Kurichia community was enthusiastic to share their culture of cultivation and experiences. Suran Tulsi tharavad reported,

> We have firm faith that if we do cultivation without harming the land there will be prosperity. We were the ones who did organic farming since the beginning. In olden times, we used only organic manure like green leaves, ash and cow dung in the paddy field. We used to have herds of cattle and we used to tie them in the field itself. Our lands used to regenerate its fertility by itself but today its fertility is lessened by unwise human intervention of adding chemical fertilisers. We used to believe that applying chemical fertiliser to land is like hiding explosive bombs in the land.

Lampan (45) from Paniya community, Kunnil said,

> We have half an acre of paddy field, and we don’t use fertilisers even in small amounts. If our paddy plants get over after cultivating half of our paddy field, we prefer to leave it barren instead of getting paddy plants from our neighbours since they all use fertilisers. Even though we are sticking strongly to organic farming we don’t get free organic manure from the agricultural office since it is necessary to have one acre land for getting the benefits from there.

The Adivasis are the ones who practice organic farming more than the non-Adivasis, who get the benefits of it from the Krishibhavan and other development agencies. Jacob (2006) points out the increase in the use of chemical fertilisers for cultivation and highlights that in Kerala there are markets where bananas from Wayanad are banned from sale due to their high pesticide content.

A panchayat president from the study area reported,

> We are promoting organic farming and for organic products we are finding a separate market for better prices. We have formed nine groups who do organic farming.

He further revealed that there was no Adivasi among these groups. However, the natural organic cultivators are not counted when it was organised under branded names.

One Kurichiya Karanavan reported,

> I know the non-Adivasis who are members of the organic farmers’ group and indulge in unethical practices of adding chemical fertilisers. In one group of organic farmers the membership reduced from 20 to six due to unethical practices. Nobody can test the whole produce in a laboratory and the only way is to cultivate love for earth and its inhabitants.
The Adivasis who were the real practitioners and promoters of organic farming in Wayanad through their indigenous cultivation practices and land use patterns were not given any consideration when it was introduced as a modern concept. The ‘scientific’ contributions of these people were neither recognised nor were they included in the new movement even though they use the most modern trends of ecologically sound cultivation practices and life sustaining practices in their daily lives. Adivasi culture is dynamic like all cultures and it cannot stay permanent forever. It seems to stagnate, because of the lack of space they are experiencing for its evolution and expansion. For instance, the real innovators and practitioners of eco-friendly farming became traditional and were left out when traditional knowledge achieved a ‘modern trade mark’ of organic products from the MNCs and TNCs. Today this trend is so widespread that Adivasi practices and knowledge are stolen by elite groups in new internationally accepted terms for business and profit.

Instead of promoting Adivasi participation in the modern world, they have been branded as underdeveloped, and the paternalistic state and its bureaucracy have seemingly assumed the ‘responsibility’ to ‘develop’ them. Today indigenous knowledge and their rights are not important when development programmes are planned. So what is controversial is not a traditional-modern divide but the fact that modernity has to stick to the core of traditional values to sustain the earth and its life forms. However, when indigenous knowledge is used for modern scientific development, traditional people are not given any credit for it. Appadurai (1990) criticises the formal announcement of the gap between ‘official’ agronomic knowledge and the traditional knowledge of farmers and highlights the formation of indigenous agronomic discourse in which the knowledge of the farmers is absorbed into a larger rationalised discourse without giving credit to the actual practitioners. However, Adivasi’s indigenous knowledge and values are today becoming the core values for human existence in society. When Adivasi tradition becomes the core, resource redistribution and ecologically sustainable small-scale projects will flourish. From that core, modernity can move like a spiral and acquire different forms promoting their knowledge as well as the knowledge to sustain the earth.
Subjects of Development or Objects?

The objectification of land and its resources and thus the objectification and colonisation of Adivasis are continuing in the modern development planning also. The Adivasis use symbolic representations to explain the top down development programmes and the objectification of Adivasis that underlie these programmes. Nellan from Paniya community was furious,

We are like chained dogs. As dogs wait for their food we have also been waiting for the pittance from government. We were never taught to be self reliant. Authorities bring a full pot before us and we are fed with one full shovel and they take away the pots with the remaining share. The Government has tied us in 5 cents. We have no other place to go and we cannot even sell this to others. They are making us dogs and calling us “patti” kajathi (sarcastic stress here is on the first two syllables of the term ‘pattika jathi’ and patti in Malayalam means dog) Even the name ‘tribal’ is given to us by the government and it is not ours.

The above description of government initiated development indicates their discontent in making them dependent forever instead of developing self reliance by treating them as subjects rather than objects. They reported that they are not happy with the welfare measures which are steeped in corruption and they believe that what is provided for their development is looted by different rungs in the power structures. From the narratives of Adivasis it is clear that the colony culture was alien to them and what they have been seeking is self sufficient communities where they can affirm their world views. As Joshi (1998) points out, Adivasi community’s participation in different development programmes are accepted in various departmental documents and it should not remain ceremonial but has to be practised by including their world views effectively. He stresses to regard their contexts and capabilities and give them the space to develop from within.

The author of *Mavelimantam*, K.J Baby stated,

The Paniyas could not develop a dream about their life or their cultivation as they were caught as slaves after their nomadic life. They just did what the master suggested they do without planning for their well being. Being a *jenmi’s* slave there was no chance to think about ‘self development’. When they committed themselves to a landlord during Valliyoorakavu festival, it was the duty of the landlord to provide them labour opportunity, food, housing etc.

Thus, the Paniyas did not get the opportunity for self development in the past as well as in the present being deprived of land - the hall mark of Adivasi existence and survival. In a similar way, C.K Janu affirmed that without land and better economic circumstances,
the Adivasis cannot develop independent thinking and a vision of their own (Interview by Rekharaj 2008).

However, criticising the state development programmes does not mean that they have not been aspiring for modern facilities. Today, their youth and children are attracted towards modern facilities. However, the panchayat and government machinery has clear plans about even the shape and area of a Paniya’s house and facilities. Even the toilets are not in a usable condition in many Paniya colonies as they are left incomplete (photo).

Naran, a Kurichia Karanavan criticised the technical exercise of planning without considering their living context. He assertively asked

If we are put in the middle of the sea, what will we do? Now we are swimming without knowing the shore. The government is saying “we are giving you everything…” They say that from the helicopter we are dropping things via a rope and why are you not catching them? But I am swimming in the sea without seeing the helicopter and rope and I am not getting anything to hold on to.

In their narratives, development has drawn these forest dwellers to the middle of the sea. The changing metaphors express the contrast, the uncertainties and conflicts they experience with modern development. Many Kurichia elders strongly feel that development planning is away from their cultural context as their worldviews on land, agriculture and social organisation are not reflected in it. Naran was unhappy about the loss of traditional community leadership and the dissipation of the community with government interventions. He expressed the cultural conflict they face in the top down development policies and programmes. Naran asked,

If our communities are disintegrating with the development envisioned for us, how can we call it progress? The love relationship among the members also has to be developed with material advancement if it is to be perceived as progress. In pre-independent period, we lacked money. However, there was cohesion and cooperation in our community. Now it is diminishing mainly due to conflicts around property division.

Naran further stated:

Instead of top down plans, leaders have to come to our midst to plan for us and to settle our conflicts regarding land as the power of our traditional leadership is taken away by the state and its bureaucracy. The Government is making us inactive and not allowing our intelligence and culture to evolve in solving our problems. Government is not concerned about the basic elements and values in our culture to make us grow
accordingly. Our settlements were known as mittam or tharavad and the government has now named them as ‘colony’.

According to Naran, there is no meaning for material progress after destroying the warm relationship that existed among the Adivasis towards the earth and the nature around them. For him, the government has to realise that it is the conflict within the community which has destroyed them.

This does not mean that the Kurichia elders are against any kind of progress and ready to sacrifice their needs for satisfying the greed of the dominant cultures. They seek an integral development which gives due consideration to their culture and values. They seek inclusion at the conceptual level rather than superficial ‘adverse inclusion’ like exhibiting their dance or songs for entertaining the tourists in the name of inclusion of their culture.

In the narratives of Paniyas and Kurichias in this section, we have noticed the difference in the expressions even though both groups are discontent. The Paniyas expressed that even their human existence is not respected by the development planners. They are treated as lesser humans and the pittance distributed among them is being stolen by the powerful. They are totally in a dependent state and this force them to criticise the development initiatives. As the extent of marginalisation and deprivation is higher they are at the forefront of resistance movements for land and its resources. All the more, the youngsters are not able to stand the marginalisation and they are forming a defiant and resistant identity.

Naran, the Kurichia Karanavan was also mocking at the planners’ lack of common sense which could not see the difference in their cultures. At the same time, as they are able to build their minimum subsistence with the resources they have, they are far less dependent on state sponsored development. Thus, as a whole they were not totally defiant or rebellious to the development initiatives but have tried to elicit maximum benefits with the better material and cultural capital that they possess. Interestingly however, their utilisation of development programmes has not blunted their analysis of the state, bureaucracy and the non-Adivasi model and culture of development.

**State’s Perceptions vs. Adivasi Perception**
What is perceived as ‘commons’ (common lands) by the Adivasi people is perceived as ‘waste land’ by the state and non-Adivasis. During the feudal and British times there were plenty of common lands with open access to all social groups but owned by none. The concept of private property (exclusive ownership of land) and the administrative regime by the state began from when the British legalised the exclusive power of the private owner, thereby restricting the access of others. The Adivasis who believe in the philosophy of communal ownership and customary rights hoped that the resources from land and forest will permanently be theirs and would be inherited by their future generations. For them, land was not a private property but they belonged to the land. This perception of land by the Adivasis has been totally altered by the British law; even now the Paniyas have not freely internalised the concept of private property. Their need for communal ownership is articulated in manifold ways like ‘we have dug only a root’, ‘but “they” are calling us thieves’. However, today they have started rejecting these comments and during an interview, Nellan a Paniya affirmed,

We are taking the fruits of the earth. We do not go for stealing money from the bank or steal gold like the non-Adivasi people.

A Paniya youth Viju reported,

Even if non-Adivasis are not using different edible roots such as Noorakkizhangu, Narakizhangu and firewood by themselves, many of them hesitate to give it to us. Then the only way left is to take it without their notice.

Here we can sense two levels of consciousness and two kinds of world views. The Paniyas are called thieves when they take firewood or some food material from the neighbours’ land which was the common land they freely accessed decades ago and now an unknown law imposed on them has banned their access to those lands. It is noteworthy that the Paniyas are generally not caught for stealing valuables, like the non-Adivasis. What they collect from their neighbourhood is part of their nomadic culture and out of necessity for their survival. The tendency to describe Paniyas as thieves, murderers, and naxalites re-emerged especially during the Muthanga land struggle to stop them from land acquisition.

In the everyday as well as the organised struggles of the Adivasis, we see that accessibility to land and resources was their greatest dream. Historically, most of their conflicts and contestations revolved around right to land and its resources than a protest
for more benefits and concessions from the Adivasi department or government. The
government, Adivasi development departments and non-Adivasis were deaf to this cry.
The perception that “Adivasis need land only for housing” persisted for long and this
view was reflected in all development planning for Adivasis in Wayanad. In the
Muthanga struggle, as we shall see below, Adivasis attempt to reformulate this
development frame of the state.

**Muthanga Struggle – Reclamation of their Material, Cultural and Political Worlds**

Muthanga struggle described in Chapter IV highlighted the material, cultural and political
importance of land in Adivasi life. At Muthanga, they challenged the ‘mainstream
development’ process and proclaimed that another development is possible which respect
the pluriform expressions of life.

Ammu an AGMS activist from Kurichia community stated,

> Janu has shown us the way. Through Janu, I realised that without people’s
> mobilisation and action in a movement, the government is not going to give us land.
> Even though there is a rule for us to acquire revenue land and vested forest, political
> parties had hidden the fact from us for long. The political party’s goal is to spread
> their stronghold among us and not our self development. On the contrary, the AGMS
> organised the people who do not have land and empowered us to ask for our rights
> and it was a long process. Under Janu’s leadership, we acquired land in Panavally in
> 1995. Around fifty families occupied the land from Paniya, Kurichia, Kattunayaka,
> and Adiya communities. But till now we have not been provided with house
> numbers and ration cards. We are not called for any meeting in the panchayat. After
> we acquired this land under Janu’s leadership, the Marxist Party acquired another hill
> called Kappikkunnu to show that they are also capturing land for Adivasis. The Party
> tried its best to alienate our group from here but since we are informed by Janu that
> this is vested forest meant for Adivasis we resisted their move and they could not
> displace us from here.

Panavally in Thirunelli Panchayat stands as a victorious symbol of Janu’s land struggles
where Paniya, Adiya, Kurichia and Kattunayaka communities live together to prove that
they even abandon their clan structure and differentiations when they gather around the
issue of land.

C.K Janu said,

> All Adivasi issues are related to the issue of land and I could organise all the sections
> of Adivasis throughout Kerala under this issue. The Adivasis are forgetting all their
> differences and being united around the issue of land. The Paniyas and Kurichias
fought together for land as they realised landlessness is powerlessness and being landless, they become subservient to the landed class.

When Adivasi people are at the verge of extinction, AGMS’s priority is survival of their people and according to them that survival is related to land and its resources. Janu and other Paniya leaders were of the opinion that if they cease to survive with dignity, where is the need for schools, health facilities and infrastructure? They stressed land as the basis of their culture and basic asset for their day to day living, and distribution of land and the relationship they attach to land has to be given first priority for other developmental programmes to become meaningful.

AGMS is against the development policies of the government, which aims at making profit at the cost of their tradition, culture and food patterns. The leaders of Muthanga struggle asked, “Development is for whom and for what if it is killing people and nature by selling the resources to the multinational companies?” Janu said that Adivasis still perceive the sacredness in the land, trees, mountains, streams and animals. Janu challenged the ‘mainstream development’ by saying “Adivasis never privatised water or asked user fee to anybody who came to share it with them, nor did they destroy it in the name of development”. She expressed their efficiency to take responsibility for their development as it is happening in Aralam Farm. She stated,

When the company was in charge of the farm, all the products were taken by multinational companies. Now the local market at Aralam has developed and become so lively since the Adivasis prefer to sell their produce in the local market. Their produce is poison free and can be used by the local people as they do not use fertilisers and pesticides in their field.

According to the Adivasis, their land struggle rooted in their culture is not only for them but for the entire humanity. In this regard, they recalled that in Plachimada, in Palakkad District, Kerala the Adivasis had gone on struggle against ground water exploitation and environmental pollution caused by the Coco Cola Company towards the protection of their land and water rights. The stoppage of the running of the Company helped the Adivasis to retrieve the stream they depended for domestic use. They can go and have a bath in the thodu, wash their clothes and bring water in small pots now. But as per their narratives the non-Adivasi large scale farmers became the main beneficiaries of the Adivasi struggle as they could continue the use of pump sets for irrigating their agricultural land as before.
Many Dalit leaders also supported the Adivasi way of treating nature as a superior unlike majority of the non Adivasis who see it as foolish. A Dalit supporter of Adivasi struggle said,

Today life in its pure form exists only among Adivasis and if others are not able to see it and practice it, they are on the way towards destruction. For instance, the relationship between human being and nature is so alive among them. On the contrary, modern science has become a profit making, comfort making machine and neglects this relationship with nature.

According to Roy Burman (2010), the Adivasi cultures are distinct and they adapt to their specific historical ecological contexts but a common thread connecting all these cultures is their rootedness in the surroundings and empathetic extension of self to the animate and inanimate world around them. However, we cannot deny the fact that they very quietly promote a life culture against the death culture of ‘modern development’ trends. Janu stated, “We are going to heal the environment spoilt by an industrial paper company in Muthanga”.

Steur (2009) expresses the environmentalist’s views, “Real Adivasis would never be so militant”, “Janu is just an innocent girl (pawam kutty)” and so on. In the interview with another environmental activist, he said that the Paniyas are people of dance and song and that they had been forcefully taken for land strike by Janu. This indicates that even environmentalists are trying to romanticise Adivasi culture to stop them from using cultural assertion as a political tool for achieving their basic rights—their land and livelihood around that. The environmentalists very easily forget the fact that land is their dancing ground and ancestral worship place which promises them a living. However, by symbolically restricting non-Adivasi’s entry to the area occupied and by symbolically declaring self rule, Adivasis negated the romantic ideas people attach to them and proved that they are a politically conscious group and can assert their rights in forceful ways. Adivasi leader C.K Janu affirms, “We will have to build huts again and again. There is no other method of struggle that catches the attention of the government. We are finding out all the places where land is available” (Interview by Rekharaj 2008).

Cheran (63) an AGMS worker, called out the slogan “Enkada poomi Enkakku” (Give our land to our people) with so much spirit and enthusiasm and he explained the story of the land in Aralam farm. Before the government acquired this land in Aralam, this land
was Paniyas’ land and from them a Haji owned it. From Haji, the government took it and declared it as government farm.

The Paniyas settled there reported that Aralam is one of the most fertile lands in Kerala and when the government was running the farm, it was running on loss. After the Adivasis’ continuous agitation for land, the government used the state’s Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) fund for three consecutive years (2003, 2004 and 2005) and bought this land from the Centre for Rs. 42 crores to distribute it to the Adivasis. Altogether, it was 7500 acres. The Government again put the condition that only 3500 acres will be given to the Adivasis and 3000 will be given back to the company. Nearly 840 families have got one acre land each and most of them are Paniyas. According to the contract, 1780 families were promised land in August 2007. Adivasi leader C.K Janu claims that they got 3500 acres in Aralam farm and that they have to plan strategies to get the remaining land (Interview by Rekharaj 2008).

The Adivasis expressed their plan to continue the strike until they get the benefits, which were promised, in the contract by the government like economic help for five years. In the agreement made with AGMS for land government mentioned that a five-year livelihood programme is to be implemented in the land until it become fully productive for Adivasis to sustain themselves but it is not fulfilled.

Malu from Alippura Paniya colony shares, “We went on a struggle for getting land. We have no place even for burying our dead. We have only four cents of land where our house is situated. We need some land at least to plant a few tapioca to eat. We are not getting even wage labour today and how can we survive.”

Non-Adivasi people and even government and non-government agencies used to say that the Paniyas are slaves and they do not have the history of land ownership to escape the injustice done to them by capturing all common properties through different laws and policies. But Paniya elders affirmed that their accessibility to land, forest and its resources, has never been threatened at any point in history, as it is today; they maintain that Wayanad has become the battle ground of land mafias. Private property right ‘enclosed’ all their common property resources, including the small thottirampu (sides of small rivers and streams). While the government postponed the resurvey due to lack of
infrastructure and personnel, the eagle eyes of land mafia survey each nook and corner and fix prices for land as it is found the most profitable commodity in Wayanad. And they very well know that they can get the Pattayam for any land with money. So land has become a rare commodity in official records to distribute to the Adivasis even though there were few favourable laws and policies during the 1970s and a historical agreement with Adivasi people in the year 2001.

The Adivasis were disheartened and they agitated against the brutality unleashed on them at Muthanga. Affected with the rumours spread by political parties and settlers, some of them even believed that Janu had cheated them and abandoned them when they met with police atrocity. The AGMS could not strengthen their grassroots mobilisation after Muthanga, defending CPI (M) and the settled community, which used all its might and tactics to defame the Muthanga struggle by attributing the support of Tamil Tigers, Naxalites and foreign agencies in the resistance movement. Also the huge number of court cases in Adivasis’ name paralysed them as it demanded time and money and they could not continue the mobilisation. However, there were Paniyas and Kurichias in the study area who affirmed their determination to continue their struggle inspite of their enormous suffering. For instance, Kunjiparu from Alippura colony stated,

> If Janu is calling us for strike and if it is for land we will go again. We are beaten and harassed for going on strike. But we believe that without land we cannot survive any more. It is not to make big mansions as everybody does but just to earn our livelihood and to educate our children and to continue our cultural traditions. Even though we have to suffer hunger or death, we will go on strike. Being part of AGMS, my fear has gone. I am illiterate, but I stood for the panchayat election. And I am proud that I got Adivasi votes without distributing liquor, money or food as the party people do it in our colonies.

AGMS’s strike is so much related to the relationship they hold to their land. That gave them energy and they became one group as Adivasis forgetting their past slavery and restrictions and differences. Adivasi Mooppans become the spiritual performer and through him, they respond to the call of their ancestors. They realised this call as the re-acclamation of their lands for their survival and to keep it for the future generation without wounding it more than its limits and AGMS became a great channel to realise

71 In Thirunelli Panchayat Paniya and Kurichia communities said that CPI (M) party has shown CD’s depicting Janu deserting her own people at the time of police brutality and they convince Adivasis that she makes money for herself and not for Adivasi cause. Her house (incomplete due to lack of money) with three rooms, veranda and kitchen is depicted as a mansion by many of the party leaders while I was interviewing them. Also Janu reported that one Marxist party follower published this news in the Malayalam magazine and she sent a lawyers notice against it.
that call. History reveals that when Adivasi land and natural resources are looted in the name of development and when they face threat to survival they resisted in many areas like Bastar, Kalinganagar etc. In Muthanga, the Adivasis realised that their ‘culture itself is a site of political struggle’. Baviskar (2008) discusses the cultural politics underlying the natural resource struggle and how it treats identities, interests and resources and involved in the dynamics of cultural production and reproduction. In Muthanga, the Adivasis could disseminate their political consciousness of cultural superiority by challenging the development agencies interventions in destroying the land, forests and environment their resources for survival in the name of development.

Baviskar (2008) highlights that the enclosure movement, which was part of the great sweeping change in property relations, turned peasants into proletarians in Britain. She points out that the commons were crucial to the subsistence of English peasants who protested fiercely against the institution of draconian laws like the Black Act that cut off their resources previously guaranteed. However, the moral economy that asserted the right of commons to the landless Adivasis is threatened by privatisation of biodiversity and land. Paniyas and Kurichias in Wayanad too considered the fallow lands and forest resources as nature’s bounty which is not manufactured by humans and thus not to be privately appropriated or commoditised. They never believed in the incorporation of these sources of subsistence into an economy of profit. However, the land and forest policies during the British and Independent period neglected the cultural right of Adivasis over common land and forest resources. Further, the encroachments and the cultural politics played by the dominant groups alienated them from their remaining commons like kavus, trees and burial lands which they kept sacredly as extension of their own selves, and the abode of their gods. Thus, the loss of natural resources leads Paniyas and Kurichias to alienation from their own culture and identity and leads them to illhealth. Anderson and Huber (1988) point out that to the corporate, a tree is a resource for cash flow, to the forest department it was capital to be reserved and protected from Adivasis and to the bankers and planners, it was a substitute for other trees as sources of paper. They points

72 Adivasi resistance against the Industrial development planned for Bastar by the World Bank to convert Bastar forest into a pine plantation and establish pulp and paper industry during the seventies (Anderson and Huber, 1988).

73 Adivasi resistance against the Jindal Stainless Steel project in Kalinganagar, Orissa displacing Ho, Mundal and Santal tribes.
out that the outsiders consider forest as an environment but for the Adivasis, it is their home. Through land struggles they own up their marginality due to landlessness and assert the need for land for their development.

**Conclusion**

The development of Adivasis from the colonial period onwards does not resonate with their culture and customary rights and there is conflict and apathy with state initiated policies and programmes. In the Adivasi world view, land not only has material value but also assumes symbolic significance; they bestow special reverence to land and its resources. Thus, landlessness is a denial of their material and symbolic worlds. Lack of recognition of Adivasi rights on land and their relation with land by fully succumbing to the land policies of the British is the cognitive violence underlying the land reforms and it has to be acknowledged and addressed by implementing a second set of land reforms. However, the landlessness and continuous struggle and resistance of Adivasis and Dalits for land and the surplus and untitled lands held by the plantation owners and rich landed class in Wayanad even today reveals the futility of land reforms to the Adivasis in Kerala.

An unfulfilled effort is being made to address the land question of the Adivasis and the historical injustice done to them. However, there is lack of political will to give land to the Adivasis as the state and judiciary are allied with the powerful group as capital determines the power relations. The positive policies and programmes are not reaching the landless Paniyas or they are not of much use to both the communities since these policies and programmes do not consider their knowledge and world views or their cultural and ecological setting. However, the Kurichia community is in a comparatively better position in accruing benefits due to its land base and the socio, political and cultural advantages associated with that.

The Adivasis strongly oppose the commodification of land and its resources and have been asserting for an economy that is embedded in the societal relationship and ecologically grounded practices. In an era of modern capitalist development and the various ecological problems accumulating around it, the Adivasis’ attempt to show a way forward to upgrade the life sustaining capacity of nature and its resources centred on land and production of life rather than commodification of life sustaining resources for
economic progress and ‘development’. However, the modern discourse rooted in hierarchical power relations neglects the cultural values they hold and pull Adivasis towards this capitalist developmental model. Despite being in the midst of this push and pull and enormous amount of suffering, they put forth a powerful critique of state development programmes which neglect their relation to land and nature, and which deny their cultural evolution. The Adivasi leaders are found to be very optimistic about their ability to build another development culture which protects nature and human beings if they are provided with land.

The state and the capitalist society deny the material and symbolic worlds of the Adivasis and thus exert violence in manifold ways and this presses them towards resistance to regain their worlds which is centered on land and related resources. Their resistance at Muthanga put forth a different pattern of human and social development based on plural cultures and values of ecological, social and cognitive justice. Their resistant movements highlight another discourse on Adivasi identity, culture, politics and development different from the ‘mainstream’ articulations of them as ‘other’ and ‘backward’.