CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR) is an ecologically sensitive area where the livelihood issues of tribal communities and the existence of near extinct wildlife species along with the conservation of environment and International Tourism converges creating conflictual conditions. The present study tries to explore the transition of the Tribal Communities of Periyar Tiger Reserve viz. the Mannans and Uralies of Peermedu Taluk in Idukki District. The study generates an ethnographic profile to highlight the process of transition of the tribal life and tries to find out the impact of development programmes. The process of tribal transition is more complex and is related to the changes in the basic socio economic conditions. However, factors such as the use of Malayalam was instrumental in bringing or incorporating the tribal communities more and more under the influence of dominant groups of non-tribals.

Since the study aims at understanding the transition of the tribal life, the social structure and the process of transition of these tribal communities have to be examined. There are a number of forces
bringing out changes into the traditional system. The increased interaction of the Mannans and the Uralies with the non-tribals is considered a major factor in bringing changes in their ways of life. The spaces of interaction include market, educational institutions, participation in Hindu religious festivals and temple rituals and increased interaction with tourists both domestic and international. Along with that we shall also consider the tribal interaction with the non-tribals of the locality.

Welfare programmes targeting tribal communities which are the offshoots of mainstream notions of development is a major area of enquiry in the present study. This shall necessitate an analysis of the ideas of development.

Development is essentially a process of change initiated with an objective of improving the quality of life. For certain sections of society, that are considered as weaker sections, the process of change would aim at bringing them into the mainstream of socio-economic system. Left to itself, the process of change even if initiated by an external stimulus, would not be sustainable for these sections. In most cases development had been depending on increased exploitation of natural resources, displacement of people from their traditional habitat.
‘Development’ refers to economic, socio-political and cultural processes of change in human societies\(^1\). The dominant paradigm of development, a direct continuation of the 500 years of colonial history is predicated on a belief in the superiority of the west, of western knowledge, and western technology and of western civilization as a whole. The feasibility of the seminary western paradigm of development that has inexorably affected the entire third world, has been question marked since the last couple of decades\(^2\).

Historically, the idea of “Development” was mostly materialistic and objective and with all the responsible instruments combined together to bring about development while the mankind is still groping in the dark for the ideal set up for the same\(^3\). Development or a version of it is creating disadvantaged people. Even as it creates wealth for a few, it leaves the others with an irreparable sense of loss and impoverishment. And when these people make an attempt of resistance, they inevitably come into conflict with the law. Already marginalized,

they are further faced with the daunting task of facing up to State Power\textsuperscript{4}.

**Objectives**

The thesis would explore histories and traditions of both Mannan and Urali tribal communities from the perspective of history of development. These communities do not provide a space for continuous narrative of their histories. Instead what one could attempt is a historical narrative that would take into account discontinuous events and weave histories of that.

The history of development could provide a perspective that would enable us to make sense of the dynamism of the interaction between the tribal communities and the state. It does not mean that their interaction were always positive that would lead to development. On the contrary we could find failures of policies that fell short of the objectives. However such failures and instances also remain crucial in the history of development.

The major concerns of the work are the following:

- In order to understand the complexities of development, it is proposed to analyse various programmes of the government

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid.
introduced over a period of time aimed at tribal development. They include programmes for education and economic development.

- Educational programmes include special tribal programmes aimed at reducing the rates of dropouts among tribal children and special incentives for their retention in the school. We will also look at why many of the strategies failed to attain their proclaimed objectives.

The current dismal performance of Mannans and Uralies in the educational field compared to non-tribal population owes to the failure of policies. These particular problems have to be discussed in detail.

- The tribal economy has changed fundamentally in the last few decades. This change is characterised by their reduced dependence on forests. Communities such as Mannans and Uralies were encouraged to settled agriculture both within the forests and the fringe areas. Within the forest the Uralies were given separately marked land for cultivation and the Mannans were more taken to non-agricultural profession and some of them are still practicing as marginal farmers.
• The present study looks into the social change of Mannan and Urali tribes by analyzing their interaction with the non tribals and thereby the changes that are visible in their lives and culture.

In addition to this, I also look at the various programmes of the government aimed at improving their economic conditions. Of all the programmes introduced so far the most successful was the Eco-development programmes from 1990 onwards which were a relatively better one and which will be discussed in further details.

Most of the programmes introduced by the government were bureaucratic in nature. It was, in other words, a top down approach. When the Eco-development programme was introduced, the Forest department was forced to change state-centred development notion and incorporated with the new ideas of participating the tribals in the new schemes aimed at their development. There was a move to change the top down approach to development.

• It is intended to explore further changes in the social structure of the communities. Along with the economic and educational issues, we shall also consider the changes induced by market,
tourism, interaction with non tribal people and new structures of governance introduced by the State.

- Apart from this, we could also look at the changing relationships of Uralies and Mannans with land, and wage-labour leading to transition in their occupational structure.

- Cultural issues of the tribal communities such as changes in religious practices and other aspects of everyday life will also be analysed in the thesis.

- The changing nature of tribal social world and the crisis it faces will be probed in the thesis. Similarly problems of social capital are also analysed in order to explain the changing nature of the tribal society.

- Concerns on tribal marginalization and tribal welfare are largely discussed from both the disciplinary and inter disciplinary scholarly grounds. Arrival of hydro-electric project at Idukki, and the advanced areas of wildlife conservation, National Park and Bio-diversity protection caused the re-location of the tribal communities into State sponsored areas near the forest fringes.
• The present study proposes to analyse critically the various developmental activities initiated by the State aimed at increasing facilities such as housing, water supply and primary education.

Today, such policies are questioned as they have become unsustainable. Therefore we would problematise such areas of governmental programmes which defined the developmental intervention for a long time.

In the following chapter we will discuss the scholarly writings that have problematised issues of tribal social world. We consider here different traditions in Indian Social Science writing that grappled with developmental issues of tribal communities. In addition to this we also discuss issues such as histories of tribal communities, their modernization, nationalist persuasions to intervene in the tribal communities. We accomplish this by providing an analysis of the existing literature in the area beginning with colonial ethnographic and anthropological writings which will be followed by various genres of anthropological and sociological writings.