Preface

Indians are heir to a rich and fertile tradition, what with her diversity and confluence of different cultures, over which we rightfully rejoice. However, the persistence of a highly stratified society jeopardizes the unity of her social dynamics and the quality of human ingenuity. In the lowest echelons of the social hierarchy are the tribals, the untouchables and the socially and economically peripheralized sections of the society. Most of the tribal hamlets in India are dens of deprivation.

The founding fathers of our constitution had the foresight to incorporate special provisions in the constitution for the protection and development of the marginalized sections of the society, especially the tribals. The tribes remained in the outskirts of development even after five decades of planned economic development. Various governmental schemes aimed at ameliorating the tribal milieu are yet to be airborne.

The much-vaunted ‘Kerala Model’ of development failed to accelerate the pace of tribal transformation in the state. There is still a silver lining in the horizon. The job reservation provisions of the constitution of India enabled some tribal communities of the state to bank on it and attain a better material advancement in relation to their unfortunate tribal brethren. The present study seeks to evaluate the linkages between job reservation and socio-economic development of the Malai Arayan, Ulladan and Urali tribes belonging to the Idukki and Kottayam districts of Kerala. The mass conversion of the Malai Arayans to Christianity is a great watershed in their march towards progress. The consequent transformation that came over the Christian Malai Arayans is critiqued here.
The neo-liberal development paradigm adopted by our nation in the closing years of the past millennium has thrown open more problems than solutions in the tribal front. Even the constitutionally guaranteed job reservation has lost its edge as a result of the onslaught of integration into the world economy. The much needed protection and provision for positive discrimination failed to bring succor to the tribal people and they have become aliens in their own land. They are the victims of deprivation.

The researcher has developed a ‘Socio- Economic Development Index’ to measure the progress they have achieved. This is a composite index of development consisting of income, education, basic amenities, social infrastructure and freedom from social evils. Although this has been developed in the context of tribal advancement, it can serve as a general index to evaluate the progress achieved by a community.

One of the major conclusions of this study is that the Christian Malai Arayans have been more successful in utilizing the reservation provisions of the constitution of India. The socio economic development achieved by this group can be attributed to their educational attainment made possible by the initiatives of the protestant missionaries. This study does not intend to establish the superiority of any faith. But an independent evaluation of the development strategies adopted by the racial groups under study brings into prominence the effectiveness of a micro level development strategy adopted by the Christian tribals of Kerala.

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