INTRODUCTION

Marginalisation is a complex phenomenon in the present-day world and a critical concern of national and international communities. Its widespread occurrence is a consequence of several interrelated factors in socio-economic development which gain significance in the era of globalisation. In many Third World societies, people of the lower classes/castes [such as Dalit and Adivasi (tribal) communities in India] are pushed to the margins of society as a result of various historical and developmental factors. Tribal communities in India have been alienated not only from the development processes, but even from their own dwellings. As mainstream development processes tended to create social spaces of inequality, Dalit and tribal communities face marginalisation virtually in every sphere of social life. Insofar as the marginalised groups sustain a unique point of view shaped by their long-standing social position, the question of their ‘self-representation’ has become relevant in social research.

Since the mid-1970s, a number of tribal groups have emerged in India and tried to become effective instruments for political articulation and mobilisation. Consequently, a new political consciousness has been underway among the tribals, which is often referred to as ‘identity consciousness’ or ‘identity politics.’ Questions such as “who we are?” are often raised by such groups in the context of increasing marginalisation and alienation. Conceptually, identity politics is linked with marginalisation. However, the term identity politics is widely used in social sciences to describe phenomena as diverse as multiculturalism, women’s movements, Dalit/Adivasi movements, civil rights, lesbian and gay movements, separatist movements and violent ethnic and nationalist conflicts in different parts of the world. Identity politics is assumed to be cultural because identity groups advocating for recognition of and respect for their cultural differences derive their distinct group identities from their cultural matrix. They assume that activists organised around status identities understand these identities with their associated cultures in essentialist rather than socially constructed terms. Hence, new theories of ‘identity-politics' have shifted explanations from ‘interests’ and ‘norms’ to identities and solidarities, from the notion of the universal social agent to particularistic categories of concrete persons. The present study dwells upon the question of marginalisation and identity politics in the specific context of the
tribal mobilisation in Kerala, a state which has earned much acclaim in the social development index.

Statement of the Problem

The emerging theories of new social movements (NSMs) provide a framework for understanding the phenomenon of marginalisation and the rise of identity politics among the tribal communities. It would be of great interest to study how the tribal movements in India have introduced a number of tactical and organisational innovations using the power of the media and the expanded circuits of communication, and how they speak to a new audience in a different way with a different voice. Obviously, the denial of civil and political rights, social repression, exclusion, and economic inequality were the defining conditions of most tribal communities in India. The tribal communities in Kerala also continued to face marginalisation over decades. Consequently, they are forced to create a specific space for themselves (though they constitute a small minority of 1.10 per cent of the State's population). The fact that more than three-fourth of the tribes are landless and that their social conditions (in areas such as livelihood, housing, health and sanitation, education, welfare etc) remained very much below the state average shows the extent of marginalisation.

Plausibly, the basic question of the tribal communities in Kerala today is land alienation. Kerala is a predominantly agrarian economy characterised by highly distorted distribution of land, and adverse land-man ratio aggravated the inequality in terms of income and wealth. The land and forest have been the vital sources of tribal livelihood but, over years, the tribal communities have been marginalised and alienated as a result of the internal migration and policies pursued by successive governments in Kerala. It has created a miserable condition for them who were devoid of human dignity and minimum amenities such as food, shelter, clothing, etc. In spite of the Constitutional guarantees and legislative measures, put in place from time to time by the Union as well as the State governments, the tribal communities continued to suffer from the dispossesssion of their valuable lands. Why this has happened in a state like Kerala, which has seen various democratic movements and progressive/revolutionary politics for the last century, is a critical question that is being addressed today.
A Profile of the Problem

Tribals are called ‘Adivasis’ (original dwellers) in India who have been living in the subcontinent from unrecorded time, and possibly driven them into the forests by more aggressive newcomer actors. Currently, the tribal population of India accounts for nearly 8.2 per cent of the total population. The Indian Constitution contains elaborate provisions for protecting the rights of tribal communities and for the promotion of their interests. The Constitution envisages a two-way approach to the tribal question: one is to protect them from various levels of exploitation and the other is to promote their development at all levels. However, in spite of all Constitutional guarantees and legislative measures, the tribal communities continued to remain marginalised. The scenario in Kerala too is illustrative of this situation.

In Kerala, there are more than three dozen tribal communities. Among them Mala Arayans, Paniyans, Kurumans, Kurichyars and Irular are majority in number. Land is the mainstay of tribals and more than 90 per cent of them depend on agriculture and allied activities. Land is the only tangible asset of the tribals and, therefore, they have an emotional attachment to the land. However, over years, the land has been alienated, largely because of the expanding interests of the settlers from other parts of Kerala. A watershed in the history of the tribal demand for the restoration of their land was the 1975 legislation for restoring alienated land to the tribals. But it could not be implemented in the state due to the pervasive influence of the settlers. The alienated land has been, mostly, in the hands of non tribes. This has apparently set the stage for political mobilisation of the tribals in the state.

Admittedly, successive governments in Kerala have failed to address the perpetuation of injustice against the tribal people. This provided a historical context of the emergence of identity politics among the tribal communities which they effectively used for political mobilisation. The discontent among the tribals was visible since early 1990s. A section of the tribals who were disappointed with the mainstream political parties formed an organisation called Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (AGMS) led by C.K. Janu. It was an organisation functioning among the tribal communities in Kerala. AGMS has been able to
bring the plight of tribals to the limelight and set off a large-scale agitation, mostly in an unconventional way. The Muthanga struggle (in the Wayanad district of Kerala) in February 2003 was the culmination of the Adivasi frustration over the failure of successive governments in the state to restore Adivasi land. The Adivasis had put up huts and other shelters in the area and announced that they would start cultivating the occupied area. Even after weeks of their occupation of the forest land, the government chose to remain silent. Capitalising the aggressive mood of the local people and the agitating Adivasis, the police launched its operation on 19 February 2003 resulting in human loss and considerable destruction. For more than 1000 Adivasis living in the area for a month and a half, it was a day of horror. Muthanga was a turning point for the tribal mobilisation in Kerala. The Adivasis not only deployed unconventional tactics to highlight their marginalisation, but effectively utilised the power of the media and the expanded circuits of communication.

After one year of the Muthanga incident, AGMS became Adivasi Rashtriya Maha Sabha (ARMS) and put candidates in the Lok Sabha elections. The establishment of ARMS was claimed to have opened a new history in the Adivasi struggle. It revealed the political consciousness of Adivasi communities in Kerala with respect to the declaration of tribal habitations as Scheduled Area under Scheduled V of the Article 244 of the Constitution. It may be noted that no Adivasi habitation in Kerala has been declared Scheduled Area till this date, thus denying the enjoyment of this most vital and specific part of the Constitution by the Adivasis of Kerala in stark contrast to their counterparts in other states in India. Obviously, this paved the way for the political mobilisation of the Adivasis in Kerala.

Review of Literature

There is a vast array of literature on questions of marginalisation and identity politics from different perspectives and contexts. Leonard (1984) and Charlesworth (2000) offer insights on these themes from the experiences of the West. Singharoy (2001) discusses the question of marginalisation comprehensively drawing examples from the vast terrains of the socio-economic landscape. He argues that the plight of indigenous people is almost universally one of marginalisation and such situations have so often been comparatively
problematic. Marginalisation has also many links between the state and globalisation, as Ghai (1997) writes. In the contemporary world, globalisation and the changing role of the state have contributed to the worsening scenario of marginalisation. This is examined in different contexts by many scholars like Chomsky (2000), Petras & Veltmeyer (2001), Potter (2000), Pilger (2002) et al.

There are also many scholarly studies on how identity politics fits into the political landscape. Taylor (1989) examines the nature of subjectivity and the self. Dusche (2010) says that the aim of identity politics is to subvert a given legal ethical background consensus and change the constitutive nature of the body politic. He argues that as it is an indicator of social forces questioning and attempting to change the hegemonic ideas governing societies in the world polity, the pervasiveness of identity politics worldwide can be interpreted as a challenge to established norms of secular modernity and democracy. According to Habermas (1998), emancipation movements in multicultural societies are not a uniform phenomenon. They present different challenges depending on whether the situation is one of endogenous minorities becoming aware of their identity. However, these movements’ political goals are defined primarily in cultural terms, even though social and economic inequalities as well as political dependencies are always also involved. Parekh (2008) says that the working classes, indigenous peoples, lower castes, religious minorities and others express demands not only equal civil, political, economic and other rights but also equal respect and public legitimacy or recognition for their marginalized identities. Stuart Hall (1990) suggests different modes of thinking about cultural identity and articulation.

There are several studies on new social movements (NSMs). According to Melucci (1980), NSMs represent a new era and a paradigm shift. Many scholars try to theoretically account for the appeals to identity in the new movements in relation to individual or group autonomy or particularity. Zirakzadeh (1997) says that the NSMs deploy a method of politics that tries to subvert/replace conventional political activities. The NSM theory of Melucci (1980) deems identity as the cardinal characteristic that distinguishes the ‘new’ from the ‘older’ social movements. The NSM theorists argue that contemporary movements represent fundamentally new forms of collective action, with new goals, values and constituents (Offe 1985).
Panikkar (2011) offers an insightful analysis on identity politics which he categorised into two - the politics of domination and the politics of resistance. According to him, the main aim of the former is the quest for power for which identity is invoked as a means of mobilisation. The other is the politics of rights in which identity serves as a cohesive force for achieving internal solidarity. Pathak (2006) says that a major reason behind the proliferation of identity politics in the contemporary era is that the hitherto subdued groups are overcoming the age-old silence, and refusing to be defined through the categories of the dominant group. Similarly, Ilaiah (2008) speaks on identify politics in the context of Indian Dalits saying that for a people who had no identity of their own for centuries, the struggle for identity becomes central in the realms of both thought and action. For him, this is a historical process that remained invisible for centuries. Guru (2012) would argue that the pursuit of modernity is bound to produce different levels of inequalities among different sections in the society and as asymmetry of a different kind is endemic to modernity, it is bound to create structures of inequalities, thereby its own ‘margin.’

There are many theoretical and empirical works on the tribes in India. Mention must be made of the studies and reflections by Xaxa (2003), Beteille (1995), Singh (1993), Dalton (1960), Thakkar (1941), Ghurye (1963), Pathy (1988) and Sengupta (1982). There are also historical and scholarly studies on the tribes in Kerala such as Luiz (1962), Mathur (1977), Krishna Iyer (1909), Shashi (1995), Menon (2001), Shankar (2004), Kunhaman (1989) et al. Kunhaman (1985) also offers one of the insightful studies on the tribal economy of Kerala which has been characterised by land alienation, indebtedness, exploitation, bonded labour system and poverty. About tribal land alienation in Kerala, the works of Bijoy (2003), Furer-Haimendorf (1988), Kulkarni (1974), Perera (2009), Bhengra, Bijoy and Luithui (1998), Kurup (1981), Varghese (1970) et al. are of immense importance. Kjosavik (2006), who wrote a seminal study on the Adivasi identity in Kerala, argues that the tribal identity is more about becoming than being. His main contention is that an ideology embedded in the Adivasi identity could be articulated into the Adivasi movement in the process of the struggles. Luisa Steur (2009) observes that Adivasi identity is better understood as a reaction against the hollowing out of the class politics. Analysing the emerging scenario
of the indigenous people’s struggles in Kerala, Sreekumar and Parayil (2006) argue that social movements of Adivasis find themselves in deep conflict with mainstream political parties and their front organisations. New forms of radical mobilisation have emerged through the re-negotiation of the arena in which social struggles for democracy and resistance to marginalisation take place. There are several works which provide insight into the Adivasi life-world, their struggles and mobilisation. Janu (2004, 2010), Cheria, Narayanan, Bijoy and Edwin (1997) Bijoy (1999), Raman (2002), Bijoy and Raman (2003) etc are some of them. The present study, while drawing insights and information from some of the theoretical and empirical works in place, tries to offer a different framework of understanding the tribal question in Kerala - from a multilevel perspective of marginalisation, identity politics and political mobilisation.

**Research Questions**

The present study addresses the following questions:

1. Does marginalisation have any structural linkage with identity politics?
2. Is the tribal question in Kerala a manifestation of the internal dynamics of marginalisation?
3. Has marginalisation of the tribal communities led to identity politics, thereby propelling the political mobilisation of Adivasis?
4. Does the Adivasi struggle in Kerala represent the characteristics of new social movements?
Objectives of the Study

Within the overall framework of emerging social theories, the study seeks:

1. to conceptualise problems of marginalisation in the context of the struggles of the indigenous peoples;
2. to comprehend the dynamics of identity politics in the background of the marginalisation of tribal communities;
3. to situate the tribal question in Kerala against the backdrop of the internal dynamics of marginalisation;
4. to examine the tribal land alienation in its socio-historical context; and
5. to analyse the dynamics of political mobilisation of the Adivasi communities in Kerala.

Hypotheses

The study proceeds with the following assumptions which call for rigorous testing and analysis.

1. Marginalisation appears to have a pervasive impact on the identity and living conditions of the tribal communities.
2. Identity politics seems to have a structural linkage with the land alienation faced by the marginalised tribes in Kerala.
3. The Adivasis in Kerala have an ostensible underprivileged position manifesting itself in the social indicators of livelihood, housing, health, literacy, etc. which remain very much below the state average.
4. The Constitutional safeguards and legislative measures put in place from time to time are apparently ineffective in protecting the interests and living conditions of the Adivasis of Kerala. Moreover, the mainstream political parties and successive governments have shown a general neglect of the problem of Adivasis. This seems to have triggered identity based political mobilisation among the Adivasis.
Chapter Scheme and Methodology

The thesis is structured into five chapters. The first chapter deals with theoretical questions on marginalisation and identity politics. While dealing with this, the chapter also theoretically explores the possibility of understanding the tribal mobilisation in Kerala within the framework of new social movements. The second chapter analyses the tribal question in Kerala in its socio-historical background. It also offers a socio-demographic profile of the tribes in Kerala. The third chapter examines the tribal question in Kerala in relation to the land alienation, tracing the history of the land question and the constitutional and legal implications of the tribal aspirations and the responses. The fourth chapter analyses the nature, context and strategies of Adivasi political mobilisation in Kerala. It focuses on multiple issues of identity formation, articulation and strategies of land struggle waged by the Adivasi community in Kerala. The fifth and final chapter provides the summary and conclusion of the study. The study has been carried out in a historical-analytical mode employing both theoretical and empirical data. Empirical data used in the study are based on field research conducted among the tribal communities as well as on the interviews conducted from time to time with the leaders of the Adivasi movement.