Chapter I
Marginalisation and Identity Politics: Conceptual Framework

Marginalisation is a complex and multi-layered concept. Nations can be marginalised at the global level, while classes and communities can be marginalised from the dominant social order within nations. Likewise, ethnic/caste/religious groups, families or individuals can be marginalised within localities. Marginalisation is also a changing phenomenon linked to many socio-economic factors and conditions. For instance, individuals or groups/communities might enjoy high social status at one point in time, but as social change takes place, so they would lose this status and become marginalised. Similarly, as life cycle stages change, so might people's marginalised position. Charlesworth, while analysing the working class life in a town in England, says that it is the economic changes and the social conditions they ushered in that have consigned the people to a life of marginality which, naturally enough, manifests itself in their social status, manner and style (Charlesworth 2000: 160). Peter Leonard defines social marginality as “being outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social reproductive activity.” Leonard characterises these people as remaining outside “the major arena of capitalist productive and reproductive activity” and as such experiencing “involuntary social marginality” (Leonard 1984:180-81). The experience of marginality can also arise in a number of ways. For some people, those severely impaired from birth, or those born into particularly marginal groupings (e.g. members of ethnic groups that suffer discrimination), this marginality is typically life-long and greatly determines their lived experience.

For others, marginality is acquired by later disablement or by changes in the social and economic system. The collapse of the Soviet Union, for instance, plunged millions into unemployment. In many countries, neoliberal economic policies closed down the traditional industrial base and led to unemployment and various patterns of insecure and casual employment for many. As global capitalism extends its reach, bringing more and more people into its system, more communities are dispossessed of lands, livelihoods, or systems of social support (Chomsky 2000; Petras and Veltmeyer 2001; Potter 2000; Pilger 2002).
Indeed, argued by many, capitalist development in its current globalising phase inexorably creates increasing levels of marginalisation throughout the world, particularly as collective safeguards, from indigenous cultures to trades unions and government welfare programmes are attacked.

Marginalisation is at the core of exclusion from fulfilling full social needs at individual, interpersonal and societal levels. People who are marginalised have relatively little control over their lives and the resources available to them; they may become stigmatised and are often at the receiving end of negative public attitudes. Their opportunities to make social contributions may be limited and they may develop low self-confidence and self esteem. If they do not have work and live with service supports, for example, they may have limited opportunities for meeting with others, and may become isolated. A vicious circle is set up whereby their lack of positive and supportive relationships means they are prevented from participating in local life, which, in turn, leads to further isolation. Social policies and practices may mean they have relatively limited access to valued social resources such as education and health services, housing, income, leisure activities and work. The impacts of marginalisation, in terms of social exclusion, are similar, whatever the origins and processes of marginalisation, irrespective of whether these are to be located in social attitudes (such as towards impairment, sexuality, ethnicity and so on) or social circumstance (such as closure of workplaces, absence of affordable housing and so on).

In sociological literature, marginalisation is defined as the situation in which people sit on the borders of two cultures existing within a society but are fully members of neither culture. This is obviously cultural marginalisation. More recently, the phenomenon of social exclusion is also understood alongside this. It means people who have been socially excluded have no significant role in society. They tend to be excluded from the regular productive systems within society and are problematic consumers of the benefits of society as a result of their economic situation and of minority status within. This exclusion may take the form of a lack of acceptance by the members of the majority social groupings but, even more significantly, it may give rise to discriminatory behaviour and violence. In such situations, a serious combination of cultural,
economic, political and social exclusion with the possibility of significant consequences at the personal level in terms of a lack of self-esteem and a confused self-identity mean that the individual withdraws into a world of his/her own. Marginalisation is thus a complex as well as very serious phenomenon. It can effectively push people to the margins of society, where their sense of security is in every way a threatened one (Singharoy 2001: 31-32).

The situations of marginalisation are many and varied in the contemporary scene. One situation is clearly that results from migration in its various forms. International migration has been occurring in recent years at unprecedented levels and in ever greater complexity. Refugee movements have never been greater, yet they are composed of political, economic and ecological refugees who are moving across borders as well as those being internally displaced. Labour migration is at an extremely high level today with people seeking employment opportunities in other countries. Illegal migration has also gathered considerable momentum because of increasing aspiring migrants who have fewer opportunities for legal or documented migration than in the past. Marginalisation is more commonly made up of people belonging to the country in which they find themselves marginalised. One such grouping consists of indigenous people - the aboriginals of various countries who are often perceived by majority group members as ‘inferior’ being. Their plight is almost universally one of marginalisation and such situations have so often been comparatively problematic (Singharoy 2001: 33).

In some countries, marginalisation is related to the social conditions emerging from the status of specific castes or classes. Members of these castes or classes are born into a situation of inferior status and are, therefore, in danger of being marginalised. The caste system of India is an example, while in many other countries, ethnic identity, education, living standards, etc are being perceived as the criteria of exclusion. The degree and seriousness of the exclusion varies from country to country. It would be pertinent in this context to consider the realities of gender inequality, arising from deeply entrenched attitudes among males that the female gender is the inferior gender and are pushing women into many marginal situations(Ibid: 34).
Marginalisation is a major problem adversely affecting every aspect of the quality of life creating divisions between people. It can fragment or polarise communities in such a way that social integration is threatened and the potential for building mutually supportive communities minimised. The outcome of it can also be deleterious. If the marginalisation results in violence, it seriously undermines much of the development. It is a situation in which human rights of people are not sufficiently respected and the principles of equity and equality are flouted. The society is fragmented and many might suffer from the insecurity and poverty which is almost invariably identified with a situation of marginalisation (Ibid: 35). Eventually, marginalisation assumes international dimensions with positive and negative elements. This may take the form of international solidarity among marginalised groups such as the world movement of indigenous peoples. Marginalisation can also cause a stream of migrants moving to some other country with adverse effects on inter-state relations.

In the past, marginalisation has generally been discussed in the context of immigrant status or the minority status of racial, ethnic or religious minority. However, one’s status and range of opportunities in society as a whole was offset by the sense of belonging to one’s group and the support derived from that source. Here, marginalisation is sometimes associated with low levels of aspiration which offsets the potential impact of the realities of being marginalised. In the contemporary world, two factors—globalisation and the changing role of the state—have contributed to the worsening scenario of marginalisation (Ghai 1997).

Globalisation and Changing Role of State

Globalisation is both a widespread and a multi-faceted phenomenon. The movements of goods and services, capital and labour on a massive scale are the dimensions of globalisation. International institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been established for these purposes, while trans-national corporations and international banks and governments play a crucial role in controlling the global economy. However, globalisation is not only economic but a technologically bound notion. As industrialisation makes use of the entire
global labour market and gives the dominant role in large international corporations, all advances in technology have global coverage in various ways. Cultural globalisation is another aspect. The emerging economic life propels the globalisation of ideas, especially since the globalisation of technology has resulted in a revolution in the field information and communications. Satellites beam the same news, advertisement and documentaries to all parts of the globe. Central to these global values are those values relating to high levels of the consumption of goods and services to place a high value on materialism. Globalisation is apparently more intensive and extensive as time passes (Singharoy 2001: 37-38).

Social development is the expansion of people’s choices or options in life and, here, globalisation can have positive influence too. Certainly, there are many who would glorify the actual and potential benefits of globalisation. However, there are others who would bring to light the negative consequences of globalisation. As it is, the global economy is based on the desire of companies to make profits within a highly competitive market place. Essentially, globalisation is presented by many commentators as a situation where liberalisation policies are removing state's protection against domination and exploitation by more powerful states and forcing the weaker states to compete with all other states within a set of conditions which are, in effect, controlled by the most powerful states. The well documented inequality between nations and sub-regions has shown that the powerful will grow wealthier. An economically unequal world has resulted in an increasingly unequal political world and this continues to be the situation in many parts of the world having their impact on the life of poor and marginalised people in all countries, both developed and developing (Ibid:40).

Marginalisation has highlighted many links between the state and globalisation. According to some scholars, globalisation today is at the expense of the power of the state. Politically, states are forced to relinquish some of their autonomy to external agencies and regional structures. Moreover, the power of the international economic agencies (such as the WTO, World Bank and IMF) to dictate economic and trade policies of states has become critical insofar as the refusal to accept their policy would result in the virtual exclusion from the
world economy. Culturally, the power of any state to keep out foreign cultural influences is also extremely limited. The process of globalisation has obviously been marginalising some states and increasing the degree of inequality within states. In most states there exists a section of population which is reasonably well-placed to take advantage of this ongoing process. However, in many countries, the economic structural adjustment packages which the international institutions (like IMF and World Bank) have imposed have had a very uneven impact. States have been obliged to reduce the extent of social provision for the poor to cut back on the employment, to remove price controls on which the poorer people relied and to place more emphasis on exports from which the poor would hardly benefit. The liberalisation and privatisation policies obviously put an unfair and uneven burden on the poor and they tend to increase the degree of marginalisation within countries (Ibid: 43).

In the era of globalisation, marginalisation has been widely intensified by various forms of deprivation and poverty. In every society there will be a section of marginalised groups who bear the brunt of deprivation. Various development reports/documents suggest that all over the world more than a billion people are deprived of basic consumption needs. In developing countries, nearly three-fifths lack basic sanitation, almost a third has no access to clean water and a quarter does not have adequate housing. Hence deprivation in basic capabilities encompasses deprivation in years of life, health, housing, knowledge, participation, personal security and environment.

People who are experiencing marginalisation are likely to have tenuous involvement in the economy. The sources of their income will vary. Some will be waged and some will depend on state benefits, marginal economic activity such as casual work, or charity (Sixsmith 1999). It is not unusual for people to combine, or move between, these various ways of getting money in their struggle for survival. Poverty, dependency, and feelings of shame are everyday aspects of economic dislocation and social marginalisation. The above two dimensions of marginalisation, poverty/economic dislocation and disempowerment/social dislocation can be regarded as vital. But being a member of a marginalised group also brings the risk of some more psycho-social or ideological threats. The first of these is the definition of one's identity
by others: the ideological definition of one's marginalised identity in the interest of the dominant groups in society. There have been many examples of this, and all social movements representing oppressed and marginalised groups have pinpointed and offered critiques of the phenomenon. What typically seems to happen is that the situation of the marginalised persons is portrayed as a result of their own characteristics. What is essentially a social and historical phenomenon is presented as a biological or an intra-psychic phenomenon.

Whatever may be the negative implications of ideology, the situation of oppressed people is characterised by resistance and resilience. In resilience there is scope for an enhanced, reclaimed and re-invented identity. The very fact of being oppressed, of having fundamental rights denied or diminished, elicits attempts to remediate the situation. This can be constructive or destructive or in the pathologies of self-destruction, addiction and depression. However, attempts at remediation can also be highly positive, as in collective action to improve social arrangements. As people are affected by social forces and changing social relations, and as they organise to resist oppression and reclaim what is truly theirs, they experience changes in identification and affiliation. A person who becomes unemployed is likely to lose both the social context and network of work, and to begin seeing herself in other terms - not defined by her working life. This is likely to involve a struggle, often lost, to retain a positive self-concept and not be defeated by feelings of worthlessness and superfluity (Charlesworth 2000; Leonard 1984: Chapter 9). It is worth discussing why marginalisation is actually a problem. There is something basic to the very meaning of being human. It is commonplace to find the assumption that the self precedes society, and therefore that society is made up, in a cumulative way, from individuals. An alternative view can be found in the work of figures as diverse as Karl Marx (Sève 1975) and GH Mead (1934) who emphasised the construction of the 'human essence' (Marx) or the 'mind', and the 'self' (Mead), from the “ensemble of social relations” (Marx) or the organised pattern of social relations and interactions. In other words, we “become our selves” through the relations we enter into in the society and its communities. For those people who are severely involuntarily marginalised, their selfhood, their humanity, is threatened.
Relying on multiple sources of evidence, Doyal and Gough (1984) suggest that “there are two fundamental human needs: physical health, and autonomy.” Autonomy is further divided into two levels, autonomy of agency, the ability to initiate actions; and critical autonomy, the opportunity for participation in political processes. People who are involuntarily marginalised, then, would have to be seen as having their fundamental needs compromised. Doyal and Gough go on to argue that the abstract human needs of health and autonomy can be achieved through a process of learning: learning as a social process, involving people interacting in social groups. Learning from history, learning between groups within a society or across cultures, are all very important. In fact, they argue, the ability to translate lessons into practice is what they call 'human liberation' (Doyal and Gough 1984: 22). What many of these scholars have in common is the view that human life is inseparable from the ability to enter into, and critically negotiate, social relations. For marginalised persons, groups and communities, the inability to meet these expectations has negative repercussions for their biological and psychological wellbeing.

The social and economic positions of the members of marginalised groups are essentially structured by age-old tradition, beliefs, values, customs and processes of education, socialisation and the prevailing institutional arrangements of the society etc. Indeed, the socio-economic bases of their marginalisation and powerlessness are legitimately institutionalised within these set-ups. Hence, any development initiative only reinforces the structure of subordination and marginalisation of the vast majority. As the process of empowerment aims to demolish the structure of subordination, it immediately looks for alteration in the pre-existing structure of subordination of the marginalised groups. The process of new collective identity formation has the potential of questioning and challenging the existing order, bringing alternative order and sustaining the process of new identity formation for a considerable period of time. Here social movements play crucial roles in the creation of new collective identity (Singharoy 2001: 93)

**Identity Politics**

Identity politics is understood as a new kind of politics that has emerged in the democratic life of the present-day world. It is generally associated with a host
of movements, group cultural communities that are committed to the practice of identity-based political articulation and mobilisation. Though these groupings occupy an ambivalent role within democratic politics and society, their influence and impact appear to be growing. Theorists of many views see identity politics (or politics of identity) as indicative of a qualitative alteration to the character and culture of democratic states. It reflects a shift away from political alignments driven by individual interest or ideological debates towards a culture in which citizen’s cluster under the banner of an encompassing group with its own collective personality and distinctive culture (Kenny 2004:1). Hoover notes that members of these groupings “see themselves as having in common certain important characteristics that set them apart from the larger population - a commonality that is based on difference” (Hoover 2001:201).

Identity politics has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorising founded in the shared experiences of injustice, oppression and marginalisation of social groups and communities. Rather than organising exclusively around belief systems, programmatic manifestos, or party affiliation, identity political formations characteristically aspire to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalised within its larger context. Members of that constituency insist on understanding their uniqueness that contest dominant oppressive characterisations, with the aim of greater self-determination. The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of large-scale political movements based in claims about the injustices done to particular social groups. These social movements are supported by a theoretical body of literature that takes up questions about the nature, origin and futures of the identities being defended. Identity politics as a mode of organising is intimately connected to the idea that some social groups are oppressed; that is, that one's identity as a woman or as a native of a multicultural society, for example, makes one peculiarly vulnerable to cultural imperialism (including stereotyping or appropriation of one's group identity), violence, exploitation, marginalisation, or powerlessness (Young 1990).

Identity politics begins from analysis of oppression to recommend transformation of previously stigmatised description of group membership. Rather than accepting the negative scripts offered by a dominant culture about
one's own inferiority, one transforms one's own sense of self and community, often through consciousness-raising. In the process of consciousness-raising, one begins to recognise the commonality of experiences and, from the sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change lives and inevitably end oppression. The scope of identity politics is certainly broad: the examples used in the theoretical literature are mostly of struggles within western capitalist democracies, but indigenous rights movements worldwide, nationalist projects, or demands for regional self-determination put across similar arguments. Inevitably, there is no clear-cut standard that makes a political struggle into an example of identity politics; rather, the term suggests a flexible assortment of political projects, each undertaken by representatives of a collective with a distinctively different social location that has hitherto been ignored, obliterated, or suppressed. The term is thus deployed to highlight the emergence of a new kind of social mobilisation based upon various collective identities. Gender issues, marginalised peoples’ movements and other deprived sections’ struggles and resistances are often regarded as paradigmatic examples of identity-oriented mobilisation. This new politics is inherently subversive of established ideas about the appropriate boundary between questions that are political and those that are not.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a strong supporter of the civil rights movement, argues that a liberal democracy requires a common basis for culture and society to function. In his view, basing one's politics on self-identifying as part of a marginalised group perceived to be outside of the mainstream of society causes this common basis to break down, and therefore works against creating real opportunities for ending this marginalisation. Schlesinger believes that movements for civil rights should aim toward full acceptance and integration of marginalised groups into the mainstream culture, not perpetuate that marginalisation (Crenshaw 1991).

From the above discussion of how identity politics fits into the political landscape, it is obvious that the use of the concept ‘identity’ raises a number of theoretical questions. Indeed, underlying many of the more overtly pragmatic debates about the merits of identity politics are questions about the nature of subjectivity and the ‘self’ (Taylor 1989). According to Charles Taylor, the
modern identity is characterised by an emphasis on its inner voice and capacity for authenticity—that is, the ability to find a way of being that is somehow true to oneself (Taylor in Gutmann 1994). Whereas doctrines of equality underline that each human being is capable of deploying his/her practical reason or moral sense to live an authentic ‘live qua individual’, the politics of difference has appropriated the language of authenticity to describe ways of living that are true to the identities of marginalised social groups. Sonia Kruks suggests: What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is qua women, qua blacks, qua lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of “universal humankind” on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect ‘in spite of’ one's differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself as different (Kruks 2001: 85).

For many advocates of identity politics, the demand for authenticity implies appeals to a time before oppression, or a culture or way of life damaged by colonialism, imperialism, or even genocide. Thus, for instance, Taiaiake Alfred, in his defence of a return to traditional indigenous values, argues that indigenous governance systems exemplify unique political values, radically different from those of the mainstream. Western notions of domination are conspicuously absent; in their place one finds “harmony, autonomy, and respect.” He says that the “responsibility to recover, understand, and preserve these values” lies in the fact that they “represent a unique contribution to the history of ideas,” and “renewal of respect for traditional values is the only lasting solution to the political, economic, and social problems that beset our people” (Alfred 1999: 5).

According to Michael Dusche, the “aim of identity politics is to subvert a given legal ethical background consensus and change the constitutive nature of the body politic.” He says: “To justify exclusion, injustice and violence in dealings with the other, identity politics resorts to or creates myths about the inherently inferior nature of the other and the naturalness of the self” (Dusche 2010: 83). Dusche 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.” It is “an attempt to question the framework of legitimate political expression,” thereby employing “discourse strategies that attempt to settle political controversies in non-political registers” (Ibid: 98-99). For Dusche, identity politics means “the generation of political power as an all-purpose means.” “The respective identity formula normally excludes certain classes of peoples. The power thus created is frequently directed against those excluded.” It introduces “a hierarchy between the self and other” (Ibid: 83). Habermas points out that 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, they “are related in that women, ethnic and cultural minorities, and nations and cultures defend themselves against oppression, marginalisation, and disrespect and thereby struggle for the recognition of collective identities, whether in the context of a majority culture or within the community of peoples.” 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” (Habermas 1998: 211-12).

Bhikhu Parekh writes that working classes, indigenous peoples, lower castes in India, 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 marginalised identities.” “Their struggle requires them to organise themselves and pursue their objectives collectively. Since their objectives include not just rights and interests but also recognition of identity, their organisations and demands are based on a shared sense of collective identity” (Parekh 2008: 31-32). He says that since marginalised identities “cannot attain their objective of gaining equal respect without radically changing the dominant culture, their politics, like all radical politics, has a strong cultural focus.” According to Parekh, the identity “gives a distinct point of reference, perspective and a self sphere. It also provides a common ground wherein people can meet as to share their experiences, articulate their common concerns, arrive at a view of the kind of society they want and the best way to promote it and other ways to raise their level of self-consciousness.” It also
“enables them to ask how they viewed themselves in the past, link up with the struggles and experiences and to construct an inspiring historical narrative” (Ibid: 33-34).

What is significant about the ‘identity’ of identity politics seems to be the experience of the subject, especially his/her experience of oppression and the possibility of a shared and more authentic or self-determined alternative. Thus identity politics rests on unifying claims about the meaning of politically laden experiences to diverse individuals. Sometimes the meaning attributed to a particular experience will differ from that of its subject. Making sense of such disjunctions relies on notions such as false consciousness—the systematic mystification of the experience of the oppressed by the perspective of the dominant. Thus despite the disagreements of many defenders of identity political claims with Marxism and other radical political models, they share the view that individuals' perceptions of their own interests may be systematically distorted and must be somehow freed of their misperceptions by group-based transformation.

However, critics of identity politics, and even some cautious supporters, fear that it is prone to essentialism. In its original contexts, the term implies the belief that an object has a certain quality by virtue of which it is what it is. In the contemporary humanities the term is used more loosely to imply, most commonly, an illegitimate generalisation about identity (Heyes 2000). In the case of identity politics, two claims stand out as plausibly ‘essentialist’; the first is the understanding of the subject that characterises a single axis of identity as discrete and taking priority in representing the self—as if being Asian-American, for example, were entirely separable from being a woman. To the extent that identity politics urges mobilisation around a single axis, it will put pressure on participants to identify that axis as their defining feature, when, in fact, they may well understand themselves as integrated selves who cannot be represented so selectively or even reductively (Spelman 1988). The second form of essentialism is closely related to the first: generalisations made about particular social groups in the context of identity politics may come to have a disciplinary function within the group, not just describing but also dictating the self-understanding that its members should have. Thus, the new identity may
inhibit autonomy, as Anthony Appiah suggests, replacing “one kind of tyranny with another” (Appiah in Gutmann 1994: 163). Just as dominant groups in the culture, at large, insist that the marginalised integrate by assimilating to dominant norms, so within some practices of identity politics dominant sub-groups may, in theory and practice, impose their vision of the group's identity onto all its members.

However, Stuart Hall says that there are two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first one defines it “in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.” According to this definition, “our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history” (Hall 1990: 223). The second one recognises that “there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather - since history has intervened - 'what we have become.' We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side” (Ibid: 225). In this sense, cultural identity “is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories.” But, like everything, they too “undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power.” “Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Ibid: 225).

Hall, however, acknowledges that identity “is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think.” Rather than “thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in
process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.” Saying that “cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture,” Hall notes:

> It has its histories - and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past', since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'(Ibid: 222).

Since 1970s, identity politics as a mode of organising and set of political positions has undergone numerous attacks by those motivated to point to its flaws. The conventional left wing arguments “seek to present struggles around identity as mere questions of recognition ignoring altogether the redistributive claims that are today quite central to such assertions” (Nigam 2010: 51). For many leftist commentators, identity politics is something of a bête noire, representing the capitulation to cultural criticism in place of analysis of the material roots of oppression. Marxists, both orthodox and revisionist, and socialists have often interpreted the perceived ascendancy of identity politics as representing the end of radical materialist critique (Farred 2000 and McNay 2008: 126–161). Identity politics, for these critics, is both factionalising and depoliticising, drawing attention away from the ravages of late capitalism toward superstructural cultural accommodations that leave economic structures unchanged. For example, while allowing that both recognition and redistribution have a place in contemporary politics, Nancy Fraser talks about the supremacy of perspectives that take injustice to inhere in ‘cultural’ constructions of identity that the people to whom they are attributed want to reject. Such recognition models, she argues, require remedies that “valorize the group's 'groupness' by recognising its specificity,” thus reifying identities that themselves are products of oppressive structures. By contrast, injustices of distribution require redistributive remedies that aim “to put the group out of business as a group” (Fraser 1997: 19).
The reasons given for the alleged turn away from economic oppression to themes of culture, language, and identity in contemporary politics differ. First, the institutionalisation of radicalism creates incentives for intellectuals to minimise the political importance of their own class privilege, and focus instead on other identities (in turn divorced from their economic inflections). Second, capitalist suffering may have been displaced onto other identities, interpreted through the lens of class aspiration (Brown 1995: 59–60). Third, the turn away from economic analysis may be less dramatic than some critics believe. Global capitalism is widening the gap between the over- and less-developed countries, and working to further marginalise women, ethnic or indigenous minorities, and the disabled in the so-called Third and Fourth Worlds. However, Bhikhu Parekh notes that the politics of collective identity “is a mixed blessing. It establishes solidarity among marginalised groups, empowers them, gives focus and moral energy to their cause, and challenges and opens up the possibility of pluralising the dominant culture.” As struggles are inevitably “crucial for social change and often require organised groups with clear objectives, collective identities are a necessary part of political life” (Parekh 2008: 37). He says that the “current movement for recognition is new because it encompasses a wider variety of groups, articulates its demands in the language of rights and justice and occurs in a culture that is often inhospitable to group based claims” (Ibid: 42).

**Collective Identity and New Social Movements (NSM)**

Collective identity represents a very significant part in relation to the NSMs and identity politics. It is the shared definition of a group that derives from its member’s common interests and solidarity. Collective identities people deploy in protest against embedded identities that inform people’s routine social life (such as gender, race, ethnicity, locality and kinship) and detached identities that invoke associational membership, nationalities and other self-defining experiences (Pollettal and Jasper: 2001). Many scholars try to theoretically account for the appeals to identity in the new movements in relation to individual or group autonomy or particularity. The NSMs embody the efforts for identity building vis-à-vis the political institutions. As such, through struggles to attain collective autonomy and freedom from the state intervention, NSMs
uncover those issues that have been excluded by and from political decisions. They are movements for a new democracy. Their self-limiting concept of emancipation allows these movements to offer the concept of the “democracy of everyday life” and perceive democracy as the condition for recognition, autonomy, and self-affirmation. The NSMs characterise primarily as identity-claims and their actor's assertion of their particularity against pre-constituted universal identities (e.g. nation or class), as well as their demand for universal social recognition and political inclusion (Peyman 2001: 612). Sociologists have also been attracted to collective identity as a response to gaps in dominant resource mobilisation and political process models. Collective identity is an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community and a such it is responding to the inadequacies of instrumental rationality as an explanation for strategic choice. Finally, collective identity has been a way to get at the cultural effects of social movements (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 285). The NSMs have a special relationship with identity. As a cultural force, identity defines a group's particular needs that challenge the social control of needs. The NSMs represent forces of democratisation in which identity forms the emblem of the contemporary collective action.

The NSM theory of Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci deems identity as the cardinal characteristic that distinguishes the 'New' from the 'older' social movements. Melucci tries to theoretically account for the appeals to identity in the new movements in relation to a specific criterion with respect to a shift from the industrial to the post-industrial societies in the West and in terms of the class origins of the new movements' actors and finally, in relation to individual or group autonomy or particularity (Vahabzadeh 2001). Melucci defines collective identity as “an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place” (Ibid: 619). In the current social conditions (of the post-industrial/information society), identity emerges as a means of resistance against the forms of rationalisation of life that do not incorporate differences. The features of the identity movements are control of the conditions of life, erosion of public-private separation, difficulty in empirically distinguishing between protest and marginality, or between deviance and social movements,
search for a communal identity and search for participation and direct action (Ibid).

The NSM theory goes beyond the Marxist paradigm to understand the variety of social movements that had emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Although NSM theory does not employ the language of identity politics, it represents a major theoretical effort to understand the role of identity in social movements. It has, eventually, prevailed upon the more rationalist strands of social movement theory, resource mobilisation and political process theory to attend to issues of identity and culture. NSM theory attempts to explain mobilisation as “why and when people act.” By taking this approach, NSM theory both challenges and affirms the idea that identity politics is a distinct political practice. NSM theory distinguishes class-based movements, especially past labour and socialist movements from contemporary movements organised on the basis of ideology and values such as peace, environmental, youth, and anti-nuclear movements as well as movements organised around status (Bernstein 2005).

NSM is a late twentieth century phenomenon. It is also a new paradigm in the social movement literature. The new social movement theorists argue that contemporary movements represent fundamentally new forms of collective action, with new goals, values and constituents (Ofte 1985). The term 'new social movements' refers to a cluster of movements that began to emerge in the 1960s under an assorted banner of students’ movements, peace movements, environmental movements, second-wave feminism, animal rights and so on. Jurgen Habermas offered a more detailed exposition and critique of his argument on the NSMs (Crossley 2002:149). However, NSMs are often depicted as inherently radical (Rodan 1996: 233).

It is argued that Marxist categories of social class have not been able to map the frontiers of social conflict nor the social composition of the movements' support groups or membership. Nor have the movements' goals been framed in terms of benefits for specific social classes. Although these movements have vigorously opposed many of the same forces of power, property, and privilege as the old labor and socialist movements, the form of their opposition has differed in almost every respect (Steinmetz 1994: 177). The Marxist discourse
on social movements has traditionally focused on issues of state and revolution. It was believed that the proletariat would liberate them by forcefully seizing control of the centralised state apparatus. It would, in turn, allow them to bring the means of economic production under collective control. NSM theory, by contrast, focuses upon the ways in which social movements seek to achieve change in cultural, symbolic and sub-political domains by collectively and by way of self-change. It takes seriously the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political.’ It is not correct to say that NSMs are any more concerned with local and sub-political issues than certain branches of the labour movement. Historical critiques of NSM theory have identified significant examples of 'identity politics' far back in the history of the labour movement. The point is that NSM theory has been instrumental in drawing that aspect of movement activity into clear relief. It has abandoned the model of polities developed within Marxism, wherein it focused upon parties, revolutions and states (Crossley 2002: 152).

NSM theory views the movements as historically new forms of collective action resulting from the macro-structural changes of modernisation and a shift to a post-industrial society. These macro-structural changes produced values concerned with achieving democracy rather than with economic survival. Thus, NSMs are viewed as the efforts to regain control over decisions and areas of life increasingly subject to state control. They seek to resist the colonisation of the life-world and to transform it into civil society. NSM theory views the movements as the efforts to “fight to expand freedom, not to achieve it; they mobilise for choice rather than emancipation.” It focuses primarily on expressing identity to seek “recognition for new identities and lifestyles” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 286).

According to Alain Touraine, Jurgen Habermas and Alberto Melucci, the NSMs do represent a new era and a paradigm shift among a particular strand of European intellectuals. Marxists maintain that capitalist societies are based on a fundamental conflict between their two major classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The 'historical mission' of the proletariat is to redefine their role and ensure the revolutionary overthrow of that order. Marxists, however, argue that the major fault line of conflict in capitalist societies is between workers and
capitalists. The workers’ movement is the social movement of capitalist societies. The NSMs argument is a rejection of this very specific historical thesis (Crossley 2002:150).

The NSM theorists attempt both to move beyond the tendency to afford a theoretical privilege to the working class in social movement analysis and to identify other conflicts and movements at the modern social order. Though they reject the notion that the working class is destined to be a key agent of change, they nevertheless maintain that there is a new fault line for a new order. Each type of society entails a central movement struggle. In industrial society that struggle was between the bourgeoisie, who exercised effective control over the means of material production and the proletarian movement, which sought to seize control over it. However, society has moved beyond that stage now and is moving into a post-industrial type of society. It concedes that there are a plurality of movements and political interest groups in the present era. Every society centres upon a particular mode of organisation, which terms its 'historicity'. This gives rise to one central conflict and struggle to every case. In this respect, the NSM is about the shift in the mode of such historicity and the corresponding shift in the central struggle of those societies. It is this mode of historicity that lends NSMs their 'newness,' rather than any particular empirical feature of those movements (Ibid: 151).

NSMs are said to advocate direct democracy, employ disruptive tactics, and enact the democratic organisational forms they seek to achieve. According to Albert Melucci, NSMs challenge dominant normative and cultural codes, and the question of how difference is dealt with in a given society. Thus, NSM theory identifies a broader purpose for identity politics and does not dismiss it for being 'merely' cultural, symbolic, or psychological (Bernstein 2005: 53-54). Habermas theorises the rise of NSMs as a response to both 'the colonisation of the lifeworld' and 'cultural impoverishment.' However, interaction can assume different forms and contexts and gives rise to different levels of social organisation. It consists in direct 'symbolic' interactions by way of the mutual understanding between agents and their common orientation towards shared norms and values along with other aspects of culture, knowledge and identity. When groups of agents come together to bring normative arrangements into
question they form a 'public sphere'. This is a key concept in Habermas's theory of NSMs (Crossley 2002: 154).

New social movements can be divided into four general areas: goal orientation, forms, participants, and values. Each characteristic reflects with the intervention by the system of state social control and a desire to replace these intrusive formal organisations with cooperative community networks. They also echo the desire for self-actualization within reconstituted primary group relations (Kitschelt 1981). NSM theorists stress that the new actors struggle for collective control over the process of meaning and are primarily concerned with symbolic issues and the constitution of new identities. In contrast to traditional actors, political parties and trade unions — which operate at the strategic-instrumental level of action and are concerned with material reproduction and distribution — the new movements operate at the communicative level of action and are concerned with cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation (Cohen 1983: 106). They fight for the right to realise their own identity for “the possibility of disposing of their personal creativity, their affective life, and their biological and interpersonal experience.” They are struggles for “the reappropriation of time, of space, and of relationships in the individual’s daily experience” (Buechler 1995: 219). As the advanced industrial states increasingly regulate and invade everyday life, the goal orientations of the new social movements have shifted inward in an attempt to re-appropriate dominion over their own lives from a system of supervisory institutions. Whereas prior social movements fought to secure political and economic rights from the state and other institutional actors, new social movements target their activities away from the state (Cohen 1985).

According to NSMs theorists, the NSMs differ from past movements not only with respect to what they direct their energies against, but also with respect to whose interest they represent. They are interested in the provisions of collective or intangible goods that would enhance the quality of life for all sectors of society. The member of NSMs rather falls into two categories: one those who are paying the costs of modernisation and have marginalised by the development of the welfare state and the new middle class (Klandermans et al. 1988). The movements raise a wide array of issues: the eradication of
discrimination and oppression, the rejection of traditional roles (worker, consumer, client of public services and citizen), the reappropriation of physical space (neighborhood, locality, the city), the cultural and practical redefinition of our relationship with nature (environment, consumerism, productivism) and the constitution of new identities (based on gender, age, locality, ethnicity, sexual orientation). They advocate the values of equality and participation, autonomy of the individual, democracy, plurality and difference, rejection of manipulation, regulation and bureaucratisation. One effect of bringing to public discussion issues which were previously considered private — like sexual orientation, interpersonal relations, biological identity, family relations — has been to blur the traditional lines of demarcation between the public and private spheres (Melucci 1980: 219).

The NSM perspective presents a non-reductionist approach to the study of modern societies, offering important insights into the nature of contemporary social conflicts. By moving beyond economic and class reductionism, the new perspective can identify new sources of conflict that give rise to new actors. The emphasis on processes of constitution of new identities and on the novelty of some features of contemporary movements has allowed NSM theorists to underline the degree to which these movements represent a break with past traditions. However, NSM theory has tended to ignore the organisational dimension of SMs. NSM theorists have little to say about organisational dynamics, leadership, recruitment processes, goal displacement, and so on. Given their emphasis on discontinuity (de-differentiation of roles, participatory democracy, etc.) no attempt has been made to compare SM organisations with more formal organisations and to apply organisational theory to the study of SMs. Hence, NSMs stress on direct democracy, spontaneity, non-hierarchical structures, small-scale and decentralised organisations. The NSMs seek the achievement of ‘post-materials’ values, “the preservation of social bonds, collective goods and the quality of production and consumption” (Anieri et al. 1990).

**Marginalisation and Identity Politics in India**

The identity politics in India has many dimensions distinguished by different situations of consciousness existing in the society. K. N. Panikkar categorises
them into two: “the politics of domination and the politics of resistance.” The main aim of the first is the “quest for power for which identity is invoked as a means of mobilisation.” The second is “the politics of rights in which identity serves as a cohesive force for achieving internal solidarity.” According to Panikkar, “the identity politics of the majority religion belongs to the former, whereas the identity politics of minorities, such as Dalits and Adivasis, to the latter” (Panikkar 2011).

Panikkar says that the identity politics of marginalised groups is entrenched in opposition and resistance. “Their marginality defines their identity, and the aim of the politics emerging out of it is more often aimed at inclusion and equality.” This strand of identity politics is basically different from the politics of Hindu religious identity. While the Hindu identity aims at the hegemony over marginalised groups, the main character of the former is resistance. The identity of such groups, until very recently, was ignored by either the influence of dominant ideology or social power. For instance, women were confined to the domestic space, subordinated to the power and authority of the patriarchal ideology, which women themselves had internalised. The politics of women's emancipation, therefore, is as much a struggle against patriarchy as against the entrenched patriarchal biases of women themselves (Ibid).

Panikkar goes on to argue that the most powerful articulation of identity politics did occur among the members of the lower castes, who were historically kept out of the mainstream life in society. The Dalit consciousness emerged during the period of the renaissance. Dalits endured “a double denial, both material and spiritual. They were excluded from common facilities such as the use of wells in villages or public roads or admission of children in schools. They were forced to live in segregated areas in villages. They did not have access to temples and could not conduct rituals at deaths or births, without the participation of Brahmin priests” (Ibid). He says that implied in these forms of exclusion was the possibility of the formation of an identity, in contrast to the Brahmanical order, which exercised ideological hegemony over the subordinate castes. The Dalit identity, however, was highly fractured, notes Panikkar, because of the existence of several castes within the ranks of Dalits. Jyotiba Phule tried to give them an ideological solidity through the work of the Satya
Shodak Samaj, and B.R. Ambedkar sought to imbibe the necessary political content through agitation for social and political rights. The philosophical basis for unity was advocated by Narayana Guru in Kerala and practical programmes for promoting identity by ‘Periyar’ E.V. Ramasamy. Yet, none of them was an advocate of the continued existence or necessity of caste; what they “tried to do was to address the then existing caste consciousness to go beyond castes.”

In fact, “inherent in their conception was a denial of caste, as the only caste they envisioned for mankind was that of humanism” (ibid). However, Panikkar points out that in complete contrast to the past, not only has caste identity powerfully resurfaced in contemporary India, but has also managed to be at the centre stage as a major mobilising force in politics.

Identities other than caste and religion have gained political articulation in the last few decades. Panikkar notes that some of them exist only in the margins, struggling for social attention and acceptance; some others surface intermittently with a well-formulated agenda. The identity of sexual minorities is an example of the former, whereas linguistic and tribal identities represent the latter. All these identities are real and socially constructed, yet, they cannot culminate in politics unless ignited by a sense of deprivation and marginalisation. That is the reason why all social identities do not necessarily generate their own politics. Panikkar, however, points out that the existence of identity and its articulation in politics do not have a direct relationship. “The transition of identity into politics is an extremely complex phenomenon, mediated by a variety of factors and the conjunction of several historical forces” (Ibid).

Avijit Pathak 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” (Pathak 2006: 135). He says that in India there is a growing “challenge to some of the dominant ideologies of hierarchy; be it Brahminism or patriarchy or Hindu nationalism.” The nation is “characterised by the intensity of identity politics” and it is “witnessing a struggle for recognition, for cultural autonomy and difference, for a legitimate space in the politico-economic arena” (Ibid: 136). Pathak argues that “economic
inequality often reinforces hierarchical differences.” Saying that women, Dalits, tribals and religious minorities are often economically exploited, he draws our attention to the perceptible “relationship between economic marginalisation and one’s stigmatised identity. The anguish of being marginalised/exploited often manifests itself through cultural politics – the politics of identity” (Ibid: 153). Pathak also notes that “caste identities are terribly hierarchical; these identities dehumanise us, limit our possibility and go against the notion of a holistic and integral personality” (Ibid: 154).

Speaking on identity politics in the context of Indian Dalits, Kancha Ilaiah says 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. This is a historical process that remained invisible for centuries.” In the socio-economic and political structure of caste, the image of a productive social mass is presented in the manner that the hegemonic forces want to present. According to Ilaiah, historical Brahminical texts crippled the Dalitbahujan mass life and their struggles (Ilaiah 2008; Shah 2001). The term ‘Dalitbahujan’ here refers to and encompasses the Scheduled Castes and the Other Backward Classes, the “people and castes who form the exploited and suppressed majority” (Ilaiah 2001). This is what Kancha Ilaiah writes in his work, Why I Am Not a Hindu (1996).

Ilaiah says that identity does not form in the realm of politics as authentically as it does in the spiritual realm. In the caste system, “identity is not only an unknown quantity for several communities but is unknowable too.” He reminds that the notion of human untouchability came into operation “to make the notion of identity unknowable to them.” Ilaiah notes that the “spiritual operationalisation of unknowability keeps a large human mass, which does not have its own historical struggle textualised.” Dalitbahujan were kept out of textual discourse through the means of spiritual violence. Human identity should be part of human organic existence. Ilaiah affirms that the instrument of caste was deployed “to cut the historical umbilical cord between the Dalitbahujan human being and his/her identity” (Ilaiah 2008). Gopal Guru would argue that “the pursuit of modernity particularly in a post-facto situation where the structures of inequalities are already in place is bound to produce
different levels of inequalities among different sections in the society.” As “asymmetry of a different kind is endemic to modernity,” it is bound to create structures of inequalities, thereby “its own margin.” Modernity based on the principle of moral minimum and moderate scarcity operates on the dynamics of competition. As the competition is uneven, modernity cannot accommodate within its core the entire population. It is bound to push certain section on to its margin. Guru says that in the Indian context, these are, indeed, women, Dalits, tribals and the invisible. “The dynamics of modernity produces and reproduces these margins through both the objective as well as subjective conditions.” Marginality is a condition which, on the one hand, “assigns only the spurious modernity” to Dalit and tribal, but, on the other, it also recognises “the superiority of the upper caste modernity.” Thus, marginalisation “suggests a horizontal movement” of Dalits who move from one margin to another even in the age of globalisation. The ideology of purity/pollution essentialises Dalits through “fixing and freezing the latter into an inferior identity,” while it generalises the twice born identity as socially superior. The “essentialisation of this identity is achieved through the continuous denial of recognition” to Dalits as “universal subject.” Thus, modernity “as a dream keeps motivating the marginal to struggle against the conditions of marginality” (Guru 2012).

No doubt, the marginalised communities in India are mostly poverty stricken, have poor access to infrastructure and information and stay in remote areas (Pathak 2006). The bases of defining marginalised groups are:

- The families that are below the poverty line and low investment in terms of nutrition, health, education and social security;
- Communities belonging to lower and backward castes;
- Communities living in remote and hilly areas where infrastructure in terms of roads, electricity and water supply are non-existent;
- Communities living and dependent on/in forests, fringes of forests areas and protected forest areas;
- Poverty is not only an economic state but is basically a process of social exclusion and marginalisation;
- This process of marginalisation excludes certain groups or communities more that the other and reduces the choices available to these groups/communities to come out of poverty;
Most of these groups/communities are based in rural areas and are directly more dependent on the natural resources for livelihoods and sustenance.

Obviously, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and women form the bulk of the marginalised sections of the population in India. Tribals (Adivasis) provide the potential basis for the formation of social collectivity that represent marginal identities. Their lives have been conditioned by the highest incidence of poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, unemployment, powerlessness and various other forms of human deprivations which have pushed them to the edge of the social margin. Historically the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes epitomise the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy of the Indian society. Though they represent only 16.20 per cent and 8.10 per cent of the population respectively (India, Census of India 2001), they have the highest share of deprivation with 50 per cent of the scheduled castes and 51 per cent of the scheduled tribes living below the poverty line. According to the 1992 National Sample Survey report, while the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes altogether form 33.7 per cent of the rural households, they represent 94.6 per cent of the total landless and semi-landless households in rural areas. Significantly, in spite of landlessness, 77.11 per cent of the scheduled castes and 90.3 per cent of the scheduled tribes were engaged in agriculture primarily as labourers, where unspecified time schedules of work, low wages, gender based wage discrimination, seasonal wage variations, total absence of legal protections, extra-economic coercion, traditional bondage, perpetual job insecurity, outmigration and seasonal nature of employment are the modes of their employment. Again, more than 95 per cent of the women in these communities were agriculture labourers (NSS 1992).

Even after several decades of independence, the literacy rates for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes remained only 54.69 and 47.10 per cent respectively (National Literacy Mission 2012). To a vast section of this community, access to basic essentials of life especially housing, minimum clothing, safe drinking water, medical care and even secured livelihood, is more a myth than reality. Representations of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in parliament and state assemblies never exceed the prescribed minimum quotas. State sponsored development initiatives and
legal actions have brought only insignificant changes for these sections of society. It is not surprising that their accumulated deprivation and latent discontent have taken the shape of various organised movements in different parts of the country (Singharoy 2001: 86).

Displacement is one of the root causes of marginalisation faced by the tribal people. The end of the twentieth century is often identified as the era of displacement in India caused by disasters that ranged from natural calamities to man-made tragedies and by the positive effort of man in the name of development. Development induced displacement in the country has brought several economic, social and environmental problems to these people. Though development induced displacement is a traumatic experience for everyone, it affects tribals differently. Almost all analyses on displacement and policies on relocation assume the household or the family to be the smallest unit of convergent interests where the benefits and burdens of policies are shared by all members. Most of the industrial projects have invariably come up in tribal dominated areas and naturally the issue of people being forced to abandon their homelands is a matter of serious concern. However, the nature and consequences of development caused displacement and marginalisation is an area that has so far received scant attention. It is being felt that the fruits of development could not be percolated to the tribal and poverty stricken people. In the name of development, in all projects, the local inhabitants have been victimised. The interests of the uprooted tribals and weaker sections have often been relegated to the background (Mohanty 2009: 346).

Keeping the above theoretical and empirical insights on marginalisation and identify politics in the background, the study tries to analyse the political mobilisation of tribals in Kerala with a specific focus on their socio-historical experiences. As suggested before, the NSMs put in place a style of politics that seeks to subvert/replace conventional political activities like lobbying or working for a political party (Zirakzadeh 1997:4-5). It is important to consider how struggles and resistances “take on particular significance here, insofar as they both represent, in different ways, efforts to overcome alienation, a sense of imbalance and domination.” These movements accelerate not only democratisation but also “a recovery of the self in a world in which politics has
been deformed” (Boggs 1995: 349). It would be of great relevance to examine how the tribal movements have introduced a number of tactical and organisational innovations using the expanded circuits of communication, and how they speak to a new audience in a different way with a different voice. The denial of civil and political rights, repression, social exclusion, economic inequality and alienation were the defining conditions of most tribals.

Of the factors that have drastically affected the lives of the tribal people, the most important are their relations with land and forest. The encroachment on land rights of tribes began with the coming of the British rule. Of these, the most important were the introduction of private property in land and the penetration of the market forces. The two opened up the way for large scale alienation of land from tribes to non-tribes, especially after the tribal areas came to be linked with the larger society by roads and railways. Despite many protective and even restorative measures taken to stop alienation of land in the post independence period, the situation remained deteriorating. The major source of alienation in the post-independence period was not only the non-tribes started intruding into the tribal land but also as the process of development. The large scale industrialisation and exploitation of mineral resources and the construction of irrigation dams and power projects that the tribal areas have witnessed during the period have been factors that have uprooted more people out of their lands than all other factors (Xaxa 2001). Over years, they find themselves increasingly subjected to impoverishment, exploitation and oppression. In fact, these have become the marked features that characterise the tribal communities in India. These being the general features of tribes at large, it is not surprising that they have come to be described as the ‘fourth world’ in social science literature (Sengupta 1982).

The condition of tribals in Kerala is not different from the rest of India. Today they are forced to create a specific space for themselves albeit they form only a small minority of 1.10 per cent of the State's population. As a result of marginalisation, more than three-fourth of the tribals is landless today and their social conditions (in areas such as housing, health and sanitation, education, welfare, etc remain very much below the state average. However, the crucial question the tribals in Kerala face today is land alienation. Kerala is basically an
agrarian economy exemplified by highly imbalanced distribution of land, and the adverse land-man ratio has aggravated the inequality in terms of income and wealth. The land and forest have been the vital sources of tribal livelihood but, today, the tribal communities have been marginalised and alienated as a result of the policies pursued by successive governments in Kerala. It has obviously sustained a miserable condition for the tribals who are now in search 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 tribals continued to suffer from the dispossession of their valuable lands. Why such a situation of marginalisation continues in Kerala, a state which has witnessed various democratic movements and progressive/revolutionary politics for than a century is a critical question that needs to be addressed. The study also raises important questions about the identity politics of tribals. It may be noted that since the mid-1970s, a number of tribal groups have emerged in India and tried to become effective instruments of political articulation and mobilisation. As a result of this, a new political consciousness has been underway among the tribals, which is commonly characterised as identity consciousness leading to a form of identity politics. Questions such as “who we are?” are frequently raised by such groups in the context of increasing marginalisation and alienation. In the following chapters, an attempt is made to examine the nature and extent of marginalisation of tribals in Kerala and the consequent rise of identity politics in the background of their political mobilisation.