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of Tribal Sub Plan through
Local Self Government
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Published and Printed by: Institute for Social and Economic Change
Dr V K R V Rao Road, Nagarabhavi Post,
Bangalore - 560072, Karnataka, India.

ISEC Working Paper No. 583

July 2024

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ISBN 978-93-93879-99-8

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The Institute for Social and Economic Change,
Bangalore

Working Paper Series Editor: **Sobin George**

THE EVOLUTION AND STATUS OF TRIBAL SUB PLAN THROUGH LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS: REFLECTIONS FROM KERALA'S EXPERIENCE

Vidya J Mathew*

Abstract

This paper aims at comprehending the history of Tribal Development programmes in pre and post independent India with special reference to Tribal Sub Plan programmes in Kerala state. The focus of this paper is to trace the changes in Tribal Sub Plan through Local Self Government Institutions after the historic 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. The observations made in the paper point towards the declining role of Local Self Government Institutions in comparison with Scheduled Tribes Development Department with respect to Tribal Sub Plan programmes in the state of Kerala during the period of 2007-2024.

Keywords: Decentralisation, People's Plan Campaign, Tribal Sub Plan, Local Self Government Institutions.

Introduction

The tribal communities in India are commonly referred to as *Adivasi* which means 'earliest residents' or *Aboriginals* that means original inhabitants of a particular region. Over the decades, with the spread of higher productive organisation of caste society under Hinduism, the tribal communities became the target of exploitation and were forced to fulfil various obligations imposed on them by the upper caste elites, chieftains and landlords (Sinha & Surjit, 1982). Their life is often characterised by servitude, poverty, isolation, misery and exploitation (Sundaram, 1998). They are considered as a weaker section of the population that lies at the lowest rung of the process of development (Jain, 2004). They are often referred to as a 'vulnerable section' in various aspects of life as they are most likely prone to harm from external factors (Singh, 1984).

Among the states of India, Kerala has fared exceedingly well with respect to the Human Development Index¹ (HDI). However, the question of its sustainability remains unanswered as there are marginalised communities in the society like the Scheduled Tribes who were least affected by the revolutionary changes in Kerala's Human Development Indices (CSSEIP 2009). The HDI of Scheduled Tribes indicates disparities when compared to the general population in Kerala (Kerala state Planning Board, 2023). Traditionally, the tribal population in Kerala dwells in the dense forests and leads a rudimentary agrarian way of life and accesses forest resources for a livelihood, making use of its traditional skills (Rajaseenan, De Venanzi & Rajeev, 2019). The escalated large-scale migration of non-

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This paper is a part of the author's on-going PhD work at the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC). The author is thankful to her supervisor Dr M Devendra Babu for his constant support and guidance.

¹ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) measures the Human Development Index (HDI) as an average measurement of three dimensions- life expectancy, education and decent standard of living (Hanagodimath 2020).

tribes into forest areas resulting in exploitation and exclusion of the tribals from mainstream development posed an impediment to the self-sustained tribal economy in Kerala (Rajasenan, Bijith & Rajeev2013). This resulted in landlessness, poverty, illiteracy, poor health and absence of occupational mobility- making them an extremely deprived and vulnerable social group in Kerala. This also made the tribal population in Kerala to appear as indelible dark spots in the glorified Kerala Model of Development² with a culture of poverty (Vernon, 2001; Govindan & Sreekumar, 2007). Thus the tribal population is probably the most deprived one among the other outliers³ in Kerala (Kerala state Planning Board, 2023).

The deplorable plight of the tribal population caught the attention of post-independence policy makers and thus the Indian Constitution termed such indigenous⁴ groups of people as 'Scheduled Tribes' under Article 342 (Das *et al*, 2014) by according them special status (Article 342, Article 366 (25)), a separate schedule (5th and 6th schedule under Article 244) and prompted the government to enact special legislation for including them and bringing them on par with the general population in India through constitutional safeguards. Over the years, the policymakers have implemented several schemes and programmes for uplifting the Scheduled Tribes across the nation. The launch of Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) during the Fifth Five-Year Plan under the recommendation of the SC Dube committee⁵ in 1972 was one such effort and marked a break through in the history of tribal development in India.

Amidst this background, this paper attempts to review the role of Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs) in the tribal development scenario in Kerala. The paper begins with understanding the historical approach towards the development of the tribal population in pre-independent and post-independent India through Five-Year Plans. The major focus of this paper is to comprehend the process of Decentralised Governance and People's Plan campaign in Kerala and to reflect upon the present scenario of Tribal Sub Plan through LSGIs in Kerala. This paper is based on secondary data consolidated from Economic Review of Kerala, Kerala state Planning Board Reports, Budget reports and important research papers in this area.

Historical Approach towards Tribal Population

The tribal population was approached differently during the pre-independent and post-independent eras. In pre-independent India, the British administrators did not interfere in the matters of the people residing in hilly areas to cut down on administrative costs and to keep the tribal population away from political interferences (Kerala state Planning Board, 2023). However, with the exploitation of landlords and expansion of railways and roads through forest lands, the tribal population revolted to attain rights

² The Kerala Model of Development can be defined as the remarkable achievements of Kerala state in attaining basic human development indicators despite of having a very low per capita income (Kannan, 2023).

³ Scheduled Tribes, Fishermen community etc. are referred to as the 'outliers' of Kerala Model of Development as they were least affected by revolutionary public action (Kurien, 1995; Dreze & Sen, 1989).

⁴ Indigenous groups are natives of a region who have distinguishable social and cultural beliefs. They often share collective ancestral ties to where they live from which they have been displaced (World Bank).

⁵ S C Dube committee was an expert committee formed in 1972 for the rapid socio-economic development of tribal people. It was set up by the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare in India.

over forest land (Kerala state Planning Board, 2023). Several studies of anthropologists and administrators like Dr Francis Buchanan, Risely, Thurston, Dalton, Hutton and others, emphasised the need for having a distinct arrangement for the tribal areas as they were aware of the difficulties in extending general administrative laws to tribal areas (Kerala state Planning Board, 2018). The Government of India Act of 1935 soon declared such backward areas as 'excluded' or 'partially excluded' areas.

In 1947, after the independence of India, the anxiety related to the subject of tribal population found expression while framing the Constitution of the Republic of India. The Constitution has accorded the tribal population special status and ordained the government to enact special legislation for bringing them on par with the modernised sector of society (Kattakayam, 1983). Thus, the Constitution included a separate schedule for this purpose, naming them 'Scheduled Tribes' so that they were constitutionally assured of protective and promotive measures. Besides the protective and promotive provisions laid down in the Constitution of India, several policy decisions have also been made with the intention of socio-economic development- individually and collectively - in tribal society. The policy of integration was adopted for tribal development, where the efforts of mainstreaming the tribal population would be without any compulsion. This meant promoting their cultural traditions, identity, self-dignity and emancipation from all kinds of exploitation. This approach was guided by the 'Nehruvian Panchsheel' (1952) – the five principles which guided the policymakers while addressing the development strategy of tribals (Verma, 1989; Saha, 2022; Dasgupta, 2016). Nehru strongly opposed any action to force them into doing something and rather believed that people should develop along the lines of their own genius. He advocated tribal rights in land and forests and suggested that their culture and customs are to be protected at any cost. He regarded collective action from all sections of the society to be the key for India's progress so that people built up their own work of administration and development. He was well aware that tribal areas should not be overwhelmed with multiple schemes at a time and suggested that their development should be viewed on the basis of the quality of human character evolved rather than statistics of funds expended. In the light of 'Tribal Panchsheel' enunciated by Jawaharlal Nehru, there have been rigorous planning efforts and allocation of funds for tribal development through budgetary allocations and development programmes for the tribal population to integrate them with the larger society as early as possible.

National strategy for tribal development

India opted for a Five-Year Plan strategy for the overall development and welfare of the country and to pay special attention to the backward communities like the Scheduled Tribes (STs). The First Five-Year Plan (1951-56) emphasised on general development programmes of all the people including the backward communities. Community Development Programme (CDP) was launched during this period to pay attention to the most backward and isolated tribal areas (KIRTADS, 2011). The Second Five-Year Plan (1956-61) focused on socio-economic development and also launched the special Multi-purpose Tribal blocks in tribal areas. The Third Five-Year Plan (1961-66) concentrated on reducing disparities in Education, Health, Economic development, Communication etc. With the recommendations from the

Elwin committee, the areas in which the tribal concentration was above 66% were converted from Community Development Blocks to Tribal Development Blocks (TDBs).

The Fourth Five-Year Plan (1969-74) attempted to raise the living standard of STs but failed to deliver since the local needs were not reflected in the schemes. This further widened the gap between the tribal and non-tribal population (KIRTADS, 2017). This unsatisfactory and slow-paced development in tribal areas was a cause of concern to the policy makers. In 1972, a taskforce was formed by the Planning Commission to study the development in tribal areas. The study found that although the STs in India account for 7.5% of the total population in the country, less than 1% of the total plan outlay was allotted to the tribal population through Five-Year Plans (Kerala state Planning Board, 2023). This indicated that inadequacy of plan outlay was a major reason for the short fall in the socio-economic development of tribal population in the country. The taskforce also opined that emphasis should be on ecological factors, occupational mobility and social parameters of development while formulating policies for tribal development. Following this, the S C Dube committee in 1972 drafted the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) as a paradigm change in the tribal development policy. The benefits provided to the tribal areas through TSP are in addition to the overall plan of a state or union territory. TSP was later introduced in 1974 during the Fifth Five-Year Plan period and in the subsequent Five-Year Plans as well.

The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-78) introduced the Tribal Sub Plan which aimed at improving the socio-economic development of the Scheduled Tribes and protecting them from all kinds of exploitations (SEEDS, 2007). It introduced Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDP) to reduce the gap between the development levels in tribal and other areas and focused solely on TSP programmes through area development. The ITDPs were implemented with the specific intention to bring down poverty, raise educational status and put an end to the exploitation of tribal families. This meant including programmes that generate income, promote infrastructural development, administrative reinforcement, eradicate exploitation in any forms and improve the capabilities of the people (Kerala state Planning Board, 2023). The TSP has various sources of funding such as state Plans, Special Central Assistance (SCA) to TSP, grants under Article 275(1), sectoral programmes of Central Ministries/ Departments and Institutional Finance.

The Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85) launched Modified Area Development Approach (MADA) so as to cover more than half of the ST population in the country in tribal pockets with a population of 10,000. The plan emphasised on family-oriented economic activities. The Seventh Five-Year Plan period (1985-90) focused on both educational as well as economic development of STs. This period witnessed a considerable increase in the flow of TSP funds from the launch of the Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED) in 1987 and National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) in 1989. TRIFED aimed to institutionalise the trade of minor forest produce and to provide a fair price to the agricultural products they produce while NSFDC provided credit, financed income-generating activities and skill development. These two agencies played a huge role in increased flow of funds for tribal development.

The Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992-1997) focused on the eradication of exploitation of tribals, land alienation and their socio-economic upliftment. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution were during this plan period and marked the beginning of a revolutionary change in

governance and planning. This established local self- governance in rural areas through Panchayats and urban areas through municipal bodies. Decentralisation through 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments focussed on devolution of functions and powers below the state to make governance decentralised, efficient, accountable, transparent, inclusive and participatory through Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs). With decentralised governance, TSP was also decentralised to Local Self Government Institutions. It was during the same period that Special Central Assistance (SCA) to the states/ union territories were enhanced by 65%. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts exempted Fifth and Sixth Schedule Areas. The administration and control of Schedule Areas and Scheduled Tribes in any of the Indian states except four states (Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram) is included in the Fifth schedule. The administration of these four states is mandated in the Sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) is based on socio-economic empowerment, social justice and people-centred development following the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution (KIRTADS, 2017). Panchayat Extension Act (PESA) of 1999 was enacted in the Scheduled Areas listed in the Fifth schedule of the Constitution during this plan period. PESA Act was launched emphasising on the active role a Gram Sabha can play in safeguarding the tribal population from all kinds of exploitation (UNDP, 2012). According to the PESA Act, power and authority was devolved to Gram Sabha and Panchayats rather than just delegation. This ensured participatory democracy in Scheduled Areas. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs was formed during the same year for exclusive emphasis on the welfare and development of STs. The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-07) extended the focus on increased outlay in education, development of forest villages and minor irrigation. During this period, the Forest Rights Act (FRA) was approved in 2006 to recognise and vest forest rights on forest dwelling tribal communities and other traditional forest dwellers. The FRA enables access and use of forest resources to the forest dwelling tribal communities that they are traditionally accustomed to, by conserving and managing forest lands.

The Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-12) concentrated on inclusive growth of the STs to bring down poverty and create employment opportunities among them. The main initiatives taken during this plan period include human resource development, physical and financial security against all types of exploitation and oppression, creation of productive assets to sustain the attained growth, enactment of Forest Rights Act etc. This Act mandates one's rights of self-cultivation and habitation, access to water bodies in forests, habitat rights for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), right to intellectual property and traditional knowledge, recognition of traditional customary rights, rights to allocation of forest land for developmental purposes to fulfil infrastructural needs of the community, and opposes eviction without rehabilitation and settlement etc. (MoTA).

The Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-17) envisaged improving the overall socio-economic conditions of the STs, strengthening of implementing agency, sensitising the officials to empathise with the lives of STs and their traditions, encouraging tribal people to participate to promote participatory governance, speedy implementation of PESA and FRA, close monitoring of the policies, provision of land for the needy and most importantly, a plan within the plan for the most deprived among STs. In the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan (2017-22), the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has emphasised on socio-economic

and political empowerment of the tribal people so as to help them practice control over their lifestyle and natural resource base by making informed choices. The aim is to help them culturally, emotionally and psychologically in the process. It was during this period that the Tribal Sub-Plan was renamed as Scheduled Tribes Component (STC) by the Ministry of Finance during 2017-18 when the plan/non-plan classification was removed. Thereafter, the monitoring of STC policy was handed over from the erstwhile Planning Commission to the MoTA.

The Tribal Sub Plan programmes through Five-Year Plans across five decades have been tribal centric and multifaceted in nature (Kerala state Planning Board, 2023). With Decentralised and Participatory Governance, Tribal Sub Plan programmes were now an integral part of developmental efforts through LSGIs (Government of Kerala, 2006). Tribal Sub Plan programmes are still considered as flagship development programmes launched for empowering the Scheduled Tribes in the country even after 50 years of their initiation. The People's Plan campaign and concerted efforts put forward by the Government of Kerala especially in empowering the marginalised communities like the Scheduled Tribes assume great importance as the development experiences of Kerala owe much to the enlightened state policies based on equity and public action (Shyjan and Sunitha, 2009). At this point, it becomes crucial in understanding if the role of LSGIs in empowering the socio-economic conditions of the STs through Tribal Sub Plan has changed over the 30 years of Decentralised and Participatory Governance.

Decentralised Governance and People's Plan Campaign in Kerala

Decentralisation is defined as the transfer of power and authority for decision making, planning, management and resource allocation from the central government to its administrative local governments, regional authorities, semi-autonomous public authorities, parastatal organisations, private entities, non-governmental private bodies or voluntary organisations. Decentralisation is based on the idea that information cost is a monotonically increasing function of the distance between the point of action at which the information is generated and the point at which the decisions are made (Marshachand Marshach, 1959). Decentralisation can be differentiated into Deconcentration, Delegation, Devolution and Privatisation. Hope (2000) explains the different types of decentralisation and defines Deconcentration as the passing down of selective administrative functions to subnational units within central government ministries. Deconcentration is considered as the least extensive form of decentralisation. Delegation on the other hand means transfer of specific authority and decision-making powers to organisations that are indirectly controlled by the central government where the central government retains the right to overturn local decisions and have the ultimate authority to take the powers back. Privatisation is when there is transfer of control and responsibility of government functions to the private sector. In this study, the most emphasis will be on Devolution which indicates transfer of powers, functions and responsibilities from the central government to local level agency/government. Devolution also includes financial powers and the authority to formulate and execute local development efforts. According to World Bank (1999), a government cannot be considered decentralised until the autonomous elected subnational governments in the country are capable of taking binding decisions in policy decisions.

While discussing Decentralisation in a developing country like India, the regional variations in natural endowments and levels of development indicate that one single strategy cannot be adopted to ensure development across the country (Gulati, 1994). Surjith (2014) rightly points out that the idea of democratic politics is based on an active citizen involvement in holding and sharing the power and responsibilities of public offices and the government. Two major schools of thought debating the issue of power distribution in a society are 'elite theorists' who argue that political power always goes to those who enjoy high status and wealth in society and 'pluralists' who believes that the combination of resources and skills of the people determines the distribution of power in a specific society (Baviskar and Mathew, 2009). These ideas have evolved over the years and currently, decentralisation is perceived as a combination of different aspects. One of the greater advantages of decentralisation is the possibility of tapping local resources by ensuring greater participation of the people in the developmental process (Chavark, 2000). The Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs) have better access to information regarding the people in the area. This helps the LSGIs in enforcing and coordinating programmes effectively (Bardhan, 1996). For the central government to gather such information will be an expensive affair and the result will be to provide a uniform level of public goods and services across the country.

Decentralised governance through devolution of powers and functions to Local Self Government Institutions also ensures Efficiency, Accountability, Transparency and Autonomy of the LSGIs (Lemmon and Ross, 2014; Holyk, 2022; Mehmet and Hasan, 2021). Decentralisation takes the government closer to the local people and encourages them to take part in the decision-making process, as they are the primary stakeholders of such developmental programmes (Surjith, 2014). Since the government is in direct contact with the people, they must maintain public accountability with them (Joseph, 1997). This also makes sure that the government maintains transparency in all its courses of action as it is answerable to the people. The vulnerable sections of the society such as the backward communities are enabled through local self-governance in increasing their capabilities, participating productively and ultimately earning their freedom to choose from (Sen, 1999). Most importantly, in the case of provision of local public goods and services, the local self-governments outperform the central government (Oates, 2005).

The need for decentralised local democratic institutions in India emerged soon enough to ensure social transformation and to realise the requirements and felt needs of the people, especially marginalised communities⁶. This led to the historic 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts ensuring local governance during the Eighth FYP period in 1992-93. Although Village Panchayats had existed earlier in India, the 73rd amendment act warrants the establishment and smooth functioning of Panchayats in rural areas. With the 73rd Amendment Act to the Constitution, the rural local governments received Constitutional status, Panchayats were established at three tiers of Village (Gram), Block/Intermediate and District/Zilla levels, direct elections were mandated to these local governments, reservations for women as well as Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the local

⁶ Marginalisation is defined as a social process in which individuals are systematically denied access to rights, opportunities and resources that prevent them from fully participating in the socio-economic and political life of society (Makwana & Elizabeth, 2022).

governance offices, formation of Gram Sabha (people's Council) mandated by the Constitution at village level etc. It enables people's action through local governance institutions in overcoming the rural inequalities based on caste, gender and tribe (Surjith, 2014). Decentralised governance thus was a turning point in the development scenario in India by ensuring a diverse, widespread, strong political foundation for inclusive and participatory governance at the grass roots level itself.

Kerala has probably taken the longest stride among Indian states in placing decentralised governance in the hands of the people (Jain, 2005). Although the idea of decentralised planning was discussed in Kerala for a long time, it was only after the 1980s that Kerala had a relatively favourable social and political environment with the setting up of District Administration Councils (KILA, 2014). However, Gulati (1994) and Ramachandran (1994) remind us how the history of Panchayati Raj in Kerala till the 1990s has been one of the aborted attempts with around three general elections to local bodies between 1956 and 1991. The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act of 1994 built a solid foundation for democratic decentralisation and participatory planning in the village areas of Kerala with a 3-tier system. It consists of Gram Panchayat at the grass roots level, followed by Block Panchayat and District Panchayat. To make recommendations for sharing the resources of the state government with the Panchayats and to improve their financial resources, a state Finance Commission was also formed during this period.

To operationalise and institutionalise the new legislations, Kerala launched a 'People's Planning Campaign' during the Ninth Five-Year Plan period in an attempt towards grassroots level planning. In this approach, the LSGIs were instructed to formulate schemes based on their needs and priorities. Based on the suggestions received in the Gram Sabha meeting, Gram Panchayats prepared plans. These plans consolidated with departmental proposals were sent to the District Planning Committee (DPC). In addition to creating new assets, maintenance and renewal of the existing assets were also included in these plans. The DPC prepares the plan for the respective district based on the proposals submitted by the LSGIs based on guidelines from the Kerala state Planning Board. If the DPC suggests modifications in certain plans, the changes are made only after discussions with the respective LSGIs. Any plan spreading beyond the limits of a GP is taken up by the BPs and any plan spreading beyond the purview of BP goes to the DP. Inter-district schemes are taken care of by the state Planning Board. In addition to these efforts, the Kerala government also devolved 35-40% of the total state plan outlay to LSGIs to ensure economic development and social justice at the grassroots level. This bold move by the Government of Kerala, by giving direct involvement to people in planning, fixing local priorities, implementation, selection of beneficiaries and monitoring of the programmes implemented revolutionised Kerala's decentralisation story.

To rectify the mistakes and omissions made in the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act following the recommendations of the Committee on Decentralisation and the state Finance Commission, the Kerala Panchayat Raj Amendment Act was legislated in 1999. The historic Act emphasised on strengthening Gram Sabha, transparency, increasing the number of constituencies, new institutions such as Ombudsman⁷ and Appellate Tribunals⁸, new system of auditing, more decision-making powers to

⁷ The ombudsman is constituted for dealing with the cases against panchayats or panchayat officials (KILA, 2014)

elected functionaries and provision for the participation of a wide number of people (KILA, 2014). These formulated legislations and unique experiences have made Kerala's decentralisation experience the most radical experiment since Independence and the historic land reforms (Namboothiripad, 2002). Apart from the powers devolved to the LSGIs, there are schemes specifically formulated for the development of backward communities like the Scheduled Tribes known as the Tribal Sub Plan. The democratic decentralisation of TSP empowered the weaker sections in society to actively involve themselves in planning meant for their own development and welfare. In fact, during the year 1997-98, about 67% of the TSP funds were devolved to the LSGIs in the state as an attempt to ensure tribal development efforts reach grassroot levels (KILA, 2014). This reinforces the significant role LSGIs has played in Tribal Sub Plan programmes since the beginning of decentralised governance in Kerala.

Tribal Sub Plan through LSGIs in Kerala

The Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India are distributed unevenly over different regions of the country and comprise of 8.6% of the total population (Census, 2011). They constitute a significant segment of India's vast and diverse populace and have been living at a subsistence level⁹ for many years (Xaxa, 1999). The tribal population in Kerala accounts for only 0.46% (Census, 2011) of the ST population in India and 1.45% of the total population in Kerala (Census 2011) - home to 36 different tribal communities concentrated in the Western Ghats and its peripheries, which exhibits distinct socio economic and ethnic characteristics in comparison with the remaining population in Kerala. Poverty is often referred to as the bane of the STs in Kerala due to centuries of continued isolation from mainstream civilisation (Chand and Puri, 1983). Acute levels of poverty, denial of human rights, deprivation and vulnerability, land alienation, isolation, socio-economic and political disempowerment, loss of indigenous knowledge, low levels of access to entitlements etc. are the characteristic features of the backwardness faced by the STs in Kerala (Ajitha, 2015). The development lag of STs in Kerala requires special attention as the majority of sections in society excel in various aspects of human development, creating a critical gap between the former and the latter (Kerala state Planning Board, 2018).

The state of Kerala after coming into existence in 1956, established a Harijan Welfare Department exclusively for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the state. The developmental efforts gained momentum with the commencement of Five-Year Plans (FYPs) in the state. During the initial years of planning, the FYPs in Kerala emphasised on educational empowerment, provision of mobile medical units, construction of houses, establishment of colonies, initiated training centres etc. New schools were established in tribal areas, especially residential schools for empowering children belonging to ST communities. The Government of Kerala initiated the Pre-examination Training Centre at Ernakulam and Tribal Research and Training Institute in 1970 at Kozhikode. The Harijan Welfare

⁸ The tribunals are formed by the government either for one district or more than one district to make revisions of the appeals against decisions of the Panchayats (KILA, 2014)

⁹ Subsistence level refers to the minimum standard of decent living in a given society during a given frame of time (Sharif, 2003).

Department was also involved in programmes related to health and hygiene, training in crafts and traditional occupations etc.

The execution of Tribal Sub Plan across different Five-Year Plans in Kerala can be categorised into four different phases. The initial phase (1974-1983) includes the introduction of TSP in Kerala in the beginning of the Fifth Five-Year Plan period (1974-79). The TSP guidelines stipulated that all states in India must earmark an amount from the overall state plan outlay for the holistic development of the ST population. The proportion of this amount should be equal to or more than the proportion of ST population in that state. The state of Kerala, since then, has earmarked TSP funds from the state plan, which has been more than the proportion of the ST population (Kerala state Planning Board, 2023). All affairs related to the development of SCs and STs were under the jurisdiction of the then Harijan Welfare Department. However, the department was soon bifurcated in 1975 into Scheduled Castes Development Department (SCDD) and Scheduled Tribes Development Department. The Department was created during 1975 as an administrative structure for the implementation and monitoring of TSP in the state (Kerala state Planning Board, 2023). During the initial years, the provision of TSP was distributed among different sectoral departments/ line departments. However, after STDD was formed, the government of Kerala pooled the TSP funds under various heads of account to a single head of account. The TSP programmes were to be formulated and implemented after identifying the tribal concentrated areas across the state. As per this direction, tribal concentrated areas were identified in the state as Integrated Tribal Development Project Areas (ITDP). Furthermore, Integrated Tribal Development Blocks were formed under the initiative of the central and state government to formulate and implement households or community based tribal development programmes in the project areas. During 1976, when the Integrated Tribal Development Projects were formed across tribal areas, the Integrated Tribal Development Block of Attappady became the first ever ITDP in the state of Kerala. Later on, six other ITDPs were launched in different districts of Kerala with specific jurisdictions during 1975-80 (Nishamol, 2020). These ITDPs included more than 70% of the ST population in Kerala and were given emphasis while implementing TSP programmes in the state.

The development of STs that does not come under the purview of these ITDPs was administered by Tribal Development Officers (TDOs). The Government of Kerala also created the Directorate of Tribal Welfare in 1975 for the promotion and welfare of STs in the state. Some of the important landmarks during these years include the formation of the Attappady Co-operative Farming Society during 1975 for improving the lives of 420 landless tribal families in Attappady by cultivating organic spices. The Sugandhagiri Cardamom Project was launched in 1977, aimed at the rehabilitation of 260 tribal families in that area. Girijan Service Cooperative Societies were established in various tribal regions to protect the tribal communities from exploitative petty traders and intermediaries during the collection and marketing of forest goods (Nishamol, 2020). It was during the same year that The Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction of Transfer on Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act was enacted in Kerala for restricting the transfer of lands by Scheduled Tribes in the state and for the restoration of lands alienated by Scheduled Tribes. This Act was later amended in 1999.

In the second phase (1984-1997), the formulation and implementation of TSP programmes were through a district-wise decentralised policy. This avoided the direct dealing of funds at the state

level. In 1983-84, TSP was decentralised at the district level which implies that a proportion of the TSP funds were allocated to the district level to formulate and implement tribal specific programmes based on their needs (Kerala State Planning Board, 2023). A District Level Working Group (DLWG) was established under the chairmanship of the respective District Collectors. The DLWG was responsible for the formulation of TSP schemes, its implementation as well as monitoring in the respective districts. With the emergence of Local Governance during 1992-1993, the Tribal Sub Plan funds were allotted between LSGIs and the Scheduled Tribes Development Department (STDD). Kerala earmarked about 67% of pooled TSP funds to LSGIs during the year 1997-98. This implies that almost $\frac{2}{3}$ rd of the TSP funds was allotted to the LSGIs, entrusting the local governments with a significant role in developing STs in the state. Although the Tribal Development Programmes were decentralised at district level since 1983-84, only the Constitutional amendment acts of 1992-93 resulted in decentralised governance and planning at the grass root level through LSGIs at rural and urban areas. Decentralisation in the local level strengthened and promoted social development in the areas of tribal habitats (Biju and Rajesh, 2019). With decentralised governance and planning, Tribal Sub Plan programmes were now devolved to LSGIs. Grassroots level planning was promoted to consolidate the real needs, especially of the marginalised people and to prioritise governance and planning on a need-based, accountable, transparent, efficient, effective and participatory basis (Isaac 2001). During this phase, Ayurvedic and allopathic dispensaries and mid-wife centres were set up near tribal areas. The DLWGs soon ceased to exist from 1997-98 at the district level with the launch of decentralised governance in state. It should be noted here that the TSP stipulates that the funds allotted under the provision are in addition to other developmental efforts (through general funds) towards the STs in the state. From the implementation of TSP during 1974-75, a portion of funds from the general sector were accounted as notional flow to TSP. However, as this notional flow rarely materialised in any of the years between 1974-75 to 1996-97, it was discontinued from the year 1997-98 onwards.

The third phase (1997-2006) emphasised on earmarking a portion of the budget provisions of Tribal Sub Plan to the local governments in accordance with the state's decentralisation policy. The involvement of LSGIs in the formulation, implementation, funding and monitoring of the TSP programmes is a remarkable revolution in the history of Kerala's tribal development strategy (Kerala State Planning Board 2008). The Maithry scheme for housing construction was implemented during this phase in 1999-2000. In 2001, the Tribal Resettlement and Development Mission (TRDM) was legislated to accelerate land distributions and resettlement, especially to landless families or to those who own less than one acre of land. The TRDM also aimed at facilitating tribal participation in formulating and implementing TSP schemes and declaration of lands under the occupation of tribal families as Scheduled Areas. During the same year, TSP funds were withdrawn from the LSGIs and the Director of STDD was entrusted with these responsibilities for about 19 months while TSP was entirely under the jurisdiction of STDD. However, the LSGIs were again given the responsibility of TSP funds during the Tenth Five-Year plan period. In 2003-04, 50% of the TSP funds were distributed between the LSGIs and the rest 50% of the TSP funds were allocated to the STDD. However, after 2003-04, the proportion of TSP funds set apart for the LSGIs has been declining.

During the Tenth Five-Year Plan period, 'Oorukoottam' was formed as a neighbourhood beneficiary group in the decentralised planning system in Kerala to overcome the vulnerability and language problems faced by the STs in the state (Baiju, 2011; Rajesh, 2015). Colloquially, *Ooru* means habitat and *koottam* means gathering (Baiju, 2011). It was the ultimate solution for the passive involvement of the tribal people in the planning process (Joseph, 2011). It was mandated that Oorukoottam must be established in all the Gram Panchayats and municipal wards to formulate developmental programmes and policies for the tribal population in each hamlet and identify eligible beneficiaries for such programmes. It was during the Eleventh Five-Year Plan period that the ownership to individual rights were provisioned for the forest dwellers. This paved the way for better infrastructural facilities for them. However, there are still a few exceptions for the implementation of land under development rights to be used for providing infrastructural amenities in hamlets. The share of TSP funds allocated to LSGIs compared to STDD started declining during the Eleventh Five-Year Plan period. Table 1 below gives a comparative understanding of TSP outlay through LSGIs and STDD and the declining trend in the proportion of TSP outlay through LSGIs to the total TSP State Plan outlay during 2007-08 to 2023-04 spread across Eleventh FYP (2007-12), Twelfth FYP (2012-17), Thirteenth FYP (2017-22) and the beginning of Fourteenth FYP (2022-27).

Table 1: Allocation Pattern of Tribal Sub Plan Outlay between LSGIs and STDD in Kerala state - 2007-08 to 2023-24

Year	Total State Plan Outlay (Rs. Crores)	Total TSP Outlay (Rs. Crores)	Share of STDD in the Total TSP Outlay (Rs. Crores)	Share of LSGIs in the Total TSP Outlay (Rs. Crores)	Share of TSP Outlay of LSGIs in the Total TSP Outlay (in Percentage)	Share of Total TSP Outlay in the Total state Plan Outlay (in Percentage)
2007-08	6950	139	50.82	66.55	47.8	2
2008-09	7705	154.1	61.9	73.2	47.5	2
2009-10	8952	180.85	100.34	80.51	44.5	2.02
2010-11	10000	200.5	112.03	88.47	44.1	2
2011-12	11030	284.19	185.1	99.09	34.8	2.5
2012-13	14010	325.05	201.43	123.62	38.04	2.32
2013-14	17000	389.85	265.55	124.3	31.88	2.29
2014-15	20000	600	460.79	139.21	23.2	3
2015-16	21573	604.5	465.29	139.21	23	2.8
2016-17	24000	682.8	526.8	156	22.8	2.8
2017-18	26500	751.08	575.09	175.99	23.4	2.8
2018-19	29150	826.19	632.59	193.6	23.4	2.8
2019-20	30610	866.26	663.27	202.99	23.4	2.8
2020-21	27610	781.36	598.26	183.1	23.4	2.8
2021-22	27610	781.36	598.26	183.1	23.4	2.8
2022-23	30370	859.5	657.95	201.55	23.4	2.8
2023-24	30370	859.5	657.95	201.55	23.4	2.8

Source: Basic data- Economic Review (various years) Government of Kerala.

The fourth and current phase can be traced during the end of Eleventh Five-Year Plan period (2007-12) onwards. The allocated TSP funds to the LSGIs were continuously declining which points to the growing significance of STDD in Tribal Sub Plan than the LSGIs. As seen in Table 1, the share of

TSP outlay to LSGIs to total TSP outlay came down to 44.1% during 2010-11 from a high of 47.8% in 2007-08 and further declined to 23.2% by 2014-15. As mentioned earlier, the guidelines on Tribal Sub Plan stipulate that the allocation of TSP funds from the overall state plan outlay should be equal to or more than the proportion of ST population in that state. In Kerala, during 2014-15, there was an increase in the allocation of TSP funds from the state plan outlay from 2-3%. It's noteworthy to say that for the past decade, the allocation of TSP funds from the state plan outlay has been pegged at 2.8% while the proportion of ST population as per Census report 2011 is 1.45% of the total population in Kerala. On the downside, there has also been reduction in the TSP share allotted to the LSGIs from the Total TSP outlay. Since the past decade, the share of TSP funds to LSGIs has been pegged at 23.2% compared to 76.8% of TSP funds to STDD.

Underutilisation of TSP funds through LSGIs may be a contributing factor to the continuous decline of LSGIs' share in total TSP outlay (Economic Review, 2023). To resolve this trend, the LSGIs were advised to make compulsory allocations for equalising the expenditure for TSP, SCP and general funds during Tenth Five-Year Plan and Eleventh Five-Year Plan periods. The unutilised portion of fund outlay was to be carried forward to the next financial year for utilisation. However, even after these efforts, the TSP expenditure still falls behind the general plans. As a result, the TSP flow to the LSGIs has been reducing further till the most recent 2023-24. The expenditure pattern and share of TSP fund utilisation of LSGIs and STDD is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Expenditure pattern of TSP outlay between STDD and LSGIs during 2007-08 to 2021-22

Five-Year Plan	Year	STDD			LSGIS		
		Budget Allocation* (Rs. Crores)	Expenditure (Rs. Crores)	Share of Expenditure to Budget Allocation (in percentage)	Budget Allocation* (Rs. Crores)	Expenditure (Rs. Crores)	Share of Expenditure to Budget Allocation (in percentage)
11th FYP	2007-08	51.09	47.09	92.16	91.18	71.16	78.04
	2008-09	61.08	55.26	90.48	97.27	73.13	75.16
	2009-10	95.1	93.77	98.6	109.71	79.78	72.72
	2010-11	93.03	80.43	89.46	120.31	78.28	65.06
	2011-12	141.69	136.78	96.54	142.03	93.07	65.53
12th FYP	2012-13	173.8	172.75	99.45	162.17	102	62.9
	2013-14	288.93	256.9	88.91	183.11	136.89	74.76
	2014-15	430.78	376.53	87.4	185.44	121.61	65.58
	2015-16	381.33	340.78	89.37	234.4	149.43	63.75
	2016-17	526.65	NA	NA	156	109.74	70.35
13th FYP	2017-18	575.08	533.75	92.81	176	135.76	77.14
	2018-19	632.59	502.13	79.38	193.6	151.29	78.15
	2019-20	663.27	428.46	64.6	202.99	110.55	54.46
	2020-21	598.26	400.59	66.98	183.1	167.06	91.24
	2021-22	598.26	367.73	61.47	183.1	119.42	65.22

Source: Basic data - Economic Review (various years) Government of Kerala.

* Budget Allocation includes unspent amounts of TSP funds from previous years also.

NA- Not Available

During the 11th FYP, Rs. 492.37 crore was allocated to TSP through STDD. However, after the revised annual budget plans, the TSP outlay was only Rs. 441.99 crore from which 93.52% was spent by the department by the end of the year 2011-12. The total outlay through LSGIs during the 11th FYP was Rs. 406.04 crore. However, with the additional unutilised TSP funds through LSGIs from previous years, the TSP fund available amounted to Rs. 560.50 crore. By the end of the FYP, the LSGIs expended only 70.54% of the total TSP fund available. During the 11th FYP, STDD have been doing well with respect to incurring TSP expenditure while there exists a significant gap between the expenditure incurred by the LSGIs during the 11th FYP period. During the 11th FYP, LSGIs have included new schemes along with ongoing schemes which increased the total TSP funds available through LSGIs. If one considers only the budgeted outlay to the TSP through LSGIs, the proportion of expenditure will be at 97.38% in the 11th FYP period.

During the 12th FYP, an amount of Rs. 1274.84 crore was the total TSP budget outlay of STDD where 89.97% was expended. The LSGIs on the other hand expended only 66.65% i.e. Rs. 509.93 crore out of the Rs. 765.12 crore of the TSP funds available during the plan period. The changes in guidelines during the course of formulating Annual Plans for the year 2012-13 affected the progress of TSP programmes through LSGIs which also affected the TSP expenditure during the same year (62.90%). During the 13th FYP, the proportion of expenditure by STDD was 92.81% in 2017-18 which reduced to 79.38% during 2018-19 as there was a general reduction in plan allocation in all sectors to the extent of 20% to meet the rehabilitation and restoration needs of the economy affected by floods during 2018. The expenditure of LSGIs reveal an increasing trend initially in the first two years of the 13th FYP. However, in 2019-20, the expenditure pattern was low for both STDD and LSGIs owing to treasury restrictions (Kerala State Planning Board, 2017). From the data so far, one can deduce that the share of expenditure of TSP funds through STDD has been 93.4% during the 11th FYP and 91% during the 12th FYP. However, this trend has declined during the 13th FYP to 73% mainly owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. The share of expenditure of TSP funds through LSGIs has been 71.4% during the 11th FYP and further decreased to 67% during the 12th FYP. During the 13th FYP, the share of expenditure through LSGIs increased to only 73%. The pattern of under-utilisation of TSP funds through Local Self Government Institutions compared to the Scheduled Tribe Development Department is quite evident from the observations made so far.

At this point, it is crucial to note that the process by which TSP programmes are formulated and implemented in STDD and LSGIs are not integrated in nature. The STDD directly formulates and implements programmes in the field of education, housing, health care and economic development. Apart from these sectors, the STDD also plays an ex-officio role to ensure that the LSGIs are formulating and implementing tribal development programmes in accordance with the guidelines. The departments also assist in implementing the schemes transferred to LSGIs through the staff transferred to local governments (Kerala State Planning Board, 2022). The major responsibility of STDD is related to the protection of STs from atrocities and exploitation from the non-tribals under the provisions of the Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989. A District Level Committee is constituted in every district for the purpose of vetting, clearing and providing administrative sanction for the projects. The District Level Committee consists of the District Panchayat President as Chairman, District Collector as Member

Secretary, District level officer of STDD and officers of line departments as members. The District Planning Officer convenes the committee. For the vetting and approval of ST projects cleared at state level, a state level working group with the Principal Secretary to SC/ST Development as Chairman is also appointed.

On the other hand, the LSGIs formulate and implement TSP programmes based on guidelines issued by the Local Self Government Departments. The programmes are formulated with the participation of tribal people through discussions made in Oorukoottams and Gram Sabha meetings. These Oorukoottams are convened during the time of project formulation, beneficiary selection and monitoring (Kerala State Planning Board, 2022). The proposals for formulating new programmes are consolidated and prioritised during Oorukoottam meetings and the LSGIs cannot change their priority but can only make suggestions. The TSP programmes formulated by the LSGIs are prioritised in housing, drinking water, sanitation, education, healthcare, nutrition, agriculture, skill development training, animal husbandry, footpaths and roads, electrification, employment generation, soil and water conservation etc. (Kerala State Planning Board, 2022). The annual TSP proposals must be approved before the District Planning Committee in the respective districts.

Although LSGIs received a major portion of TSP funds allotted since the beginning of decentralised governance in Kerala, the TSP funds have always been less compared to general plans. Kerala State Planning Board (2023) points out that this created a suspicion that the LSGIs are least invested in TSP programme formulation and implementation although there are several GPs in Kerala which have been truly enthusiastic about innovatively formulating and implementing TSP programmes in the state. This decline in TSP outlay through LSGIs is a cause of concern and affects the number of programmes that can be adopted by them for the holistic development of STs in the area. The TSP programmes implemented through LSGIs continue to be a few prioritised sectors such as housing, electricity, sanitation, drinking water etc. (Mathew, 2020). This points towards the fact that there is very limited scope for innovative programmes towards capability building and skill development of the STs, their holistic development and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite the continuing efforts and massive input made by the government in eventually removing the stigma attached to the Scheduled Tribes through inclusive planning and decentralised governance (Zaheer, 1975), the results have failed to live up to the expectations as only limited benefits have reached the tribals in Kerala (Census, 2011). The advancement of a few ST communities is noteworthy. However, the imbalances of growth within the STs among different tribal communities such as Paniya, Kaattunaicka, Adiya etc. are creating inter-tribal and intra-tribal differences (Economic Review, 2023). This is a huge challenge during development planning which addresses the STs across Kerala as one entity, turning a blind eye to their real differences.

The reasons for the failure of the tribal development programmes may be traced to the overall policy framework or the nature of strategies that were evolved to concretise the policy (Jagatdeb, 1989). An underlying weakness is that the people for whom these developmental efforts are intended are not involved in the decision-making process as much, even though the official participation of

representatives belonging to such backward communities in formulating welfare-oriented plan projects are provisioned with special attention in the Indian Constitution itself. The Planning Commission (2010) rightly notes that the tribal communities are vulnerable not only because they are poor compared to the general population but often this vulnerability surfaces from their inability to negotiate and cope with their forced integration with the mainstream society, from which they were historically protected by their relative isolation for ages. Some projects have failed due to the lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of tribal development programmes (Baiju, 2011; Chathukulam *et al*, 2011).

Although concerted efforts towards the empowerment of STs in Kerala continue every year, the current approach by these agencies like the Local Self Government Institutions and Scheduled Tribes Development Department towards the development of STs are not integrated in nature. From the observations made so far, the underutilisation of TSP funds through LSGIs are also an area of grave concern. This is one of the downsides of tribal development planning in Kerala as STDD and LSGIs are the main agencies involved in administering Tribal Sub Plan programmes in the state. The convergence of LSGIs, STDD and other line departments are crucial in effectively changing the socio-economic conditions of the STs in Kerala. In the absence of such integration, there is a lot of space for duplication errors and schemes being focused on the same prioritised sectors by both the LSGIs and STDD every year (Mathew, 2020). The institutional framework of TSP should be such that there is scope for capability building, holistic development and representation of the tribal communities in every step (Kerala State Planning Board, 2023).

The reflections so far from Kerala's experience on Tribal Sub Plan programmes formulated and implemented through Local Self Government Institutions reiterates the developmental lag faced by the Scheduled Tribes of Kerala. The increasing role of a parastatal body like the STDD in Tribal Sub Plan programmes undermines the purpose of decentralising developmental efforts towards the Scheduled Tribes in Kerala. Therefore, there is certainly a pressing need to enquire into the grass-root level reality of Tribal Sub Plan programme formulation, implementation, monitoring and outcomes to further scrutinise the role of Local Self Government Institutions in improving the socio-economic conditions and capabilities of the tribal population in Kerala. This will also aid one in recognising how the theory of decentralisation with the aim of an efficient, accountable, transparent, effective and participatory governance is practiced in reality in the state of Kerala.

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