

Changing Phases of Kerala's Development Experience and the Exclusion of Scheduled Tribes: Towards an Explanation¹

D Shyjan and A S Sunitha

The study examines whether the Scheduled Tribes of Kerala are excluded from the development experience over the period or not. We found that in terms of literacy rates, average years of schooling, retention rate and availability of basic amenities, the STs are relatively deprived. Also, while a higher proportion of general population is engaged in tertiary sector over the period; in the case of STs, a major share of population are still stuck with primary sector. All these indicate that the STs of Kerala are excluded groups both in the lopsided as well as in the virtuous phases of development. The study also advances an explanation to the observed exclusion of the Scheduled Tribes in both the phases.

I Introduction

The CDS-UN study in 1975 triggered curiosity and scholarly interest in Kerala's development experience. The study viewed Kerala state as an exemplary case of achieving high levels of social development with very low levels of economic advancement. This observation eventually became part of the global development discourse with a dictum of 'Kerala Model'. For almost three decades since the formation of the State, Kerala's economic performance was rather dismal despite its high human development, reflecting 'human development lopsidedness'.² This long period of lopsidedness precipitated a series of writings in the 1990s, which argued that Kerala economy is at the verge of a crisis due to heavy burden on welfare expenditure and declining material

D Shyjan, Lecturer, Department of Economics, University of Calicut, Dr. John Matthai Centre, Aranattukara, Thrissur 680618, Kerala, India, email: shyjandavis@gmail.com

A S Sunitha, Research Associate, Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Cochin University of Science and Technology, Cochin 682022, Kerala, India.

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¹ Scheduled Tribes in India are a legal category, often referred as *adivasis* (meaning original settlers or indigenous people).

² According to Ranis's (2000) concept of Economic Growth (EG) and Human Development (HD), HD-lopsided indicates strong HD and weak EG; and EG-lopsided refers to weak HD and strong EG. Also, if HD and EG are strong, then the situation is virtuous and if both are weak then it is vicious. Researchers conceptualized the development experience of Kerala as virtuous OR turnaround phase since the late 1980s and prior to that as HD-lopsided.