

## **Claiming Land and (Re) Claiming Identity: Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha and Indigenous Modernity in Kerala**

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*The year 2013 marks the tenth anniversary of the Muthanga Struggle led by Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (AGMS) in Kerala. Crystallization of the land-rights movement under AGMS puts forth a fundamental critique, not only of the known equations of the national modernization in the post-colonial context, but also challenges the wisdom of modernity in South Asia. This paper focuses on the organisational form and ideological contents of AGMS. It argues that the land-rights movement represented a process of collective identity assertion along with a systematised effort for democratic bargaining. At the same time, it was a physical enactment of their autonomy by the citizens under a liberal democratic set-up. By invoking memories of a collective past, and welding them with a concrete social action, AGMS laid out crucial knots— though ephemeral—of an indigenous modernity.*

### **Introduction**

Kerala Model of Development (KMD) has been characterised by high social development with a minimum economic infrastructural input. In the available literature, KMD has generally been evaluated as doing comparatively well in terms of an acquired quality in social life and human development indicators. This is not only in comparison with the other Indian states, but even with many other developing countries. After the reorganization of states in 1957, the political leadership has undertaken three measures for the development of the people. The first was a land reform programme which was legalized by the state government in 1960s, triggering a social change, especially in the mainland. The second was the implementation of minimum wage for manual labour, both in the agrarian and industrial sectors of the economy. The third was the abolition of landlordism and land distribution to the former tenants. Kerala's success on the social front is commonly attributed to the effectiveness of public action and popular mobilization (Dreze and Sen 1996) that ultimately culminated in more responsible governance. Nevertheless, concerns have been expressed regarding the relative exclusion of social sections like Dalits, Adivasis and Fisherfolks

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