

## Another Wave of Forest and Adivasi Land Alienation? Revenue *versus* Forest *Pattayam* and Adivasi Land Question in Kerala

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*This article examines the Kerala government decision to issue revenue land rights to individuals, including scheduled caste and scheduled tribes in a few districts. It also looks at a circular issued by the state forest department to do away with the myriad of issues associated with the implementation of the Forest Right Act, 2006 (FRA) in the state. Such a decision in the wake of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has raised suspicion among the community and triggered arguments and counterarguments within major tribal groups and activists in the state. These documents seem to be a clear violation of FRA. We argue that the policies might help the government and private land mafia to acquire tribal land for large-scale commercial use that further vitiate the adivasi land question in the state.*

### I Introduction

*“We don’t know what will happen to us after corona...The government is taking decision on our life without informing us in this dangerous time”—A Kurumba community member, Attappadi region, Palakkad district, Kerala; September 12, 2020.*

Like elsewhere Covid-19 has overturned the life in India too. As states in India race to put in measures to confront the pandemic there remains much uncertainty in how this situation will affect the most vulnerable population like adivasis in different states. Regarding containing Covid-19, states like Kerala have shown their capability to address such unprecedented pandemics through its much appreciated local governance mechanisms (Dutta and Fischer 2020). But, few of the other decisions taken by the state government during this time will have a significant impact on the livelihood of the scheduled tribes (ST). First of all, Kerala government’s decision to issue revenue land titles (RoRs)<sup>1</sup> locally known as *pattayam* in June 2020—amidst the height of Covid-19 pandemic—

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