UNCOVERING THE CAPITALIST FOOTPRINT: AN EXAMINATION OF THE LAND-PEOPLE NEXUS IN WAYANAD THROUGH VALLI

Descubriendo la huella capitalista: un examen del nexo tierra-gente en Wayanad a través de Valli

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ABSTRACT

The exploitation of Adivasis, by capitalist forces in Wayanad, Kerala, India is a complex issue that has been ongoing for years. Adivasis in Wayanad have faced bonded slavery, been displaced from their lands, faced loss of resources, and other forms of exploitation, often driven by the interests of organisations seeking to profit from the area's natural resources. This has resulted in the loss of traditional livelihoods, cultural practices, and community structures for the Adivasis, as well as environmental degradation. This research traces this capitalist exploitation and landlessness among the Adivasis through the lens of the novel *Valli*, originally published in Malayalam by Sheela Tomy and translated into English by Jayasree Kalathil. The study is based on a close reading and analysis of the text and its depiction of the Adivasi community and the challenges they have faced in the context of capitalist development and resource extraction in the post independent Wayanad.
Keywords: Adivasi, Wayanad, environmental degradation, climate change, indigenous exploitation.

RESUMEN

La explotación de los Adivasis por parte de fuerzas capitalistas en Wayanad, Kerala, India, es un asunto complejo que ha estado ocurriendo durante años. Los Adivasis en Wayanad han enfrentado la esclavitud por deudas, han sido desplazados de sus tierras, han sufrido la pérdida de recursos y otras formas de explotación, a menudo impulsadas por los intereses de organizaciones que buscan obtener ganancias a partir de los recursos naturales de la región. Esto ha resultado en la pérdida de medios de vida tradicionales, prácticas culturales y estructuras comunitarias para los Adivasis, así como en la degradación del medio ambiente. Esta investigación rastrea esta explotación capitalista y la falta de tierras entre los Adivasis a través de la lente de la novela *Valli*, originalmente publicada en malayalam por Sheela Tomy y traducida al inglés por Jayasree Kalathil. El estudio se basa en una lectura detallada y análisis del texto y su representación de la comunidad Adivasi y los desafíos que han enfrentado en el contexto del desarrollo capitalista y la extracción de recursos en Wayanad después de la independencia.
Palabras clave: Adivasi, Wayanad, degradación ambiental, cambio climático, explotación indígena.

1. Introduction: The Earthy Temptation

For its provision of nurturing life sustaining resources, possession of capitalist riches and its ability to procure societal status through ownership, land has always attracted people towards it. The

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fertility contained by land has been the determining and driving factor behind the early settlements followed by the monarchical conquests, the colonial occupation and the contemporary set-up of industrial and commercial zones. While revered, cared and worshipped in many cultures, land, through the lens of globalisation, has solely been the site of capitalist exploitation. Such anecdotes of capitalist conquests are stellar landmarks in the history of human civilisation.

Defined by Lane as "both a system or method of production and to a social and political system," (Lane, 1969, p. 5) capitalism predominantly involves market transactions through privatisation, resource accumulation and frontier expansion to amass wealth. Jason W. Moore, in his seminal conceptualisation of the nature of the contemporary era as the *capitalocene*, remarks how these capitalist endeavours thrive at the expense of the naturally available assets, which he terms as "the Four Cheaps" including the low-cost or freely available labour, food resources, energy and raw materials required to build wealth (Moore, 2014, p. 250). According to Moore, these, along with the land that contains these Four Cheaps, determine the value and the extent of profit that fosters the capitalist society in question. Based on this conceptualisation, the transition from feudalism is characterised by the emergence of capitalism, wherein economic and political endeavours are imbued with a paradigm of conquest, governance, and enjoyment, aimed at augmenting the wealth of the capitalist entity at the cost of the local population and the ecology.

This holds no exemption with the Indian subcontinent. Trade has been one among the prime occupations in India for centuries. With a beneficial "5,000-mile-long coastline, easy access from West Asia, Africa and East Asia, the presence of highly skilled artisans, a rich maritime tradition" (Roy, 2012, para. 1) and inter-kingdom links, India has had a favourable and definitive trade and commerce down the history. But the exploitative and mere capitalist trade in India is dated with the arrival of the East India Company on its soil. What began as a trading establishment, soon rooted itself as a colonial empire sensing the fertility, resources and the richness that could be ransacked off its earth. Evidence is plenty to point to the capitalist conquests by the East Indian Company and the colonial British empire of places favourable to mining, gathering timber, and cultivating medicinal and cash crops among many others. The establishment of Fort William in Calcutta in 1696 to monitor and protect the trade in the Bengal regions, the Battle of Arcot of 1751 over gaining trade and tax revenues between the English

and the French, the continuous and forced cultivation of indigo, tea and coffee, the trade of opium, the deforestation of the Western Ghats, and the exploitation of medicinal crops for trade are a few to state.

Post freedom, India, in need of a drastic economic boost from the deprived state left by the British, adopted and promoted various modes of commerce that were favourable to raise funds, most of it through agriculture and rapid industrialisation. Large acres of lush agricultural and forest lands were cleared to set up agriculture and commercial industries, mining sites, construct dams and promote tourism. In the process, most of the indigenous varieties of flora were lost, wild faunas were pushed deep into the wilderness and marine ecosystems were disturbed.

In the longer run, the enigma that land had always contained intoxicated capitalists to act irresponsibly towards Earth, the only home that all of humankind has got. With more and more public and private sectors set up on virgin and cleared lands and with the government's lapse at imposing stricter guidelines and maintaining checks over the sectors to operate eco-consciously, the environmental conditions of the immediate surroundings and the state of lifeforms dependent on such lands have collectively worsened or destroyed beyond redemption.

An equally paramount but comfortably forgotten and often neglected ramification of such consumerist occupation is the plight of the indigenous and native aboriginal folks that have lived fully reliant off such vandalised lands. Since most of the reclamation happens in the mountainous forests, as they are the ideal sites for dam construction, plantation, wood extraction and tourism promotion, it is the livelihood of its inhabitants that is imperilled first. As vulnerable as they are, the natives are either manipulated into migration or forcefully dislocated from the land on which they have lived for aeons, to make it fit for material consumption. In most cases, they are not compensated with land, employment or safe and inhabitable make-shift accommodations. Round the world, the displacements of indigenous during the European colonisation of the Americas from the late fifteenth century onward, the removal and the subjugation of the tribals to pave way for rubber plantations in Indochina in the twentieth century, the clearance of the local communities for the construction of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze river in China in the 1990s and the ongoing dislocation of the tribes from the Amazon forests for commercial expansion are a few notable incidents.

This article intends to bring to the forefront of such issues, the predicaments of the Adivasis in post-independent Wayanad and point to the capitalist ramifications as the cause of landlessness and resistance among the natives in India through a scrutinised study of the novel *Valli* by Sheela Tomy. Set between 1970 and 2018, *Valli*, originally published in Malayalam by Tomy in 2019 and translated into English by Jayasree Kalathil and published in 2022, is a semi-autobiographical fiction that through diary entries, email conversations and an omnipresent narration, tells the affinity that five generations of immigrant and native folk of Wayanad have had with the land.

The struggles of the Adivasi community in Wayanad are historically rooted in the issues of landlessness, land ownership and the right to own the property on which they have lived for generations, which are being either owned by migrants or have been scheduled as reserves by the government. Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam (2007) deliberate on how the laws regarding the ownership of land and land allotment over the years have stranded and alienated these natives, whose "livelihoods […] have been predominantly land and forest based, varying through years with the settlement of migrants – including ex-service personnel, peasant communities and wealthy plantation owners – left them at peril to sustain themselves without access to land and resources" (p. 1184). In *Invisible Labor: Adivasi Workers in the History of South Indian Forest Conservation*, Münster (2014) documents the primal role of the Adivasis in the Western Ghats, tracing their roots from labouring in timber manufacturing to their undeniable role in the conservation of the wildlife and the forest, while still being exploited as cheap and mostly landless workers.

While the tribals account for 18.5% of Wayanad's population, as per the *Census of India 2011* (2011, as cited in Sadath et al., 2019, p. 517) only a scanty amount of households from this statistic has been compensated with land allotment, while a majority of the lands that were distributed were then re-grouped as regions to be proposed and to be converted as a Tiger Reserve, thereby again distancing people from land ownership and barring them access to it. Global Atlas of Environmental Justice (2021), in its article titled *Eviction in Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary and Muthanga Adivasi Agitation, Kerala, India* discusses the eruption of protests leading up to these and the injustice onto the Adivasis perpetuated through the loopholes in the legal system). While a handful of academic writings have been published on the struggles of the Adivasis in Wayanad and of Adivasis in Kerala, scanty literary texts

exist to date: *Keralathile Africa* by KP Manoor –a travelogue by a former bureaucrat who spent years working with the Adivasi communities in Wayanad; *Vishakanyaka* by SK Pottekkett –a magical realist fiction that though not directly focuses on the struggles of the Adivasis but weaves the episodes of the arrival of the migrants and the Adivasi experiences within its larger narrative; and *Mother-forest: The Unfinished Story of C.K. Janu* –an autobiography by CK Janu, the leader of Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha are a few to note. Amongst these, *Valli*, as stated by Tomy, is a semi-autobiographical novel of an author who belongs to the migrant community of Wayanad and empathises with the impediments faced by the tribals of the region that acts as a clarion call to the capitalist injustices propounded to the people and the land.

While the reviews of *Valli* have been published in periodicals such as *SARE: Southeast Asian Review of English*, *Contemporary Literary Review India* by scholars and have been commented upon and been interviewed with its author by dailies such as *The Hindu*, *Hindustan Times*, *Scroll*, *Financial Express* and *First Post*, scarce studies have been attempted on exploring the historical accuracies of the Adivasi lifestyle, their marginalised existence, the commercial and capitalist exploitation and the ecological crises unto the mountains through *Valli*.

Bridging this, the study follows a scrutinised critical reading of the novel, chronologically aligning the incidents from the work with the documented historical episodes to efficiently trace the nexus of the Adivasi community in Wayanad with the immigrant communities, modernity and capitalism within their environment and the lived experiences of the population, thereby also presenting literature –autobiographic and historical fiction, such as *Valli*– as a potent medium to evince and explore less-chartered historical, political and environmental realities of the subject and open these to a wider array of questions and discussions.

2. Wayanad, Adivasis and Capitalism

Located in the Western Ghats, covering 2132 km^2 of land, Wayanad was once a land that was rich with indigenous flora and native and migratory fauna, in short, that was once an Eden. Marvelling on the richness it once contained, Tomy recollects it as

> A forest where rosewood, ben-teak, karimaruthu, red silk cotton, venga, ironwood, wild lime, wild gooseberry, jungle fig, paratti, punna, wild guava, kambakam, flame of the forest, poisonous cheru and a thousand other trees jostled and kissed each other; where asparagus, wild ginger, snake gourd, sarsaparilla, incha vines and malanthudali embraced one another and exchanged stories; where leopards, sloth bears, porcupines, wild buffalos, wild bears, pangolins, civet cats, anteaters, snakes, mongooses, muntjacs, sambars, jackals, foxes and herds of elephants chatted, hunted, mated and frolicked. A forest that belonged to dragonflies, butterflies, cicadas, ants, termites and a hundred thousand tiny creatures. (Tomy, 2022, p. 35)

The forests of Wayanad have been the home to the Adivasi community, currently classified under the scheduled tribes, who have formed the majority of its native population for centuries. The masses of them belonging to Adiyan, Paniyan and the Kuruma tribes, among many others, lived their lives for generations toiling away as bonded labourers, also regionally called as *kundalpani*, *vallipani* or *nippupani*, a system that was functional "even before the times of British Raj" in Kerala (Santhosh, 2008, p. 67). Bought during the *Valloorkavu* festival at the Sreekovil of Valliyurkavu by the landlords, *jenmis* or the landed class, they were bonded as slaves, entitled by their landlords to be employed in any task per demand. Based on the kind of bond, they had to remain as slaves for the rest of the year, their lives or until they paid off the cost of their bond money and, until then, they and their family had to till the soil of their *mothalali*, their landlord. They received meagre compensations and breaking the bond was out of the question and doing so attracted severe penalties, fearing which they least protested and persevered through life.

Despite Wayanad being under the siege of different kingdoms, their struggle remained the same and their exploitation continued. But their near-homogeneous settlement and culture were disrupted with the defeat of King Pazhassi Raja in the Cotiote War of 1805 and the subsequent annexation of Wayanad by the East India Company. Wayanad, then cultivating paddy, being a land rich with indigenous flora and the native and migratory fauna, with its fertile soil and highly favourable moist and fine climate was seen by the British as the "English vision of paradise," an apt plantation venue (Navath, 2016, p. 1093). This created a need for more labourers, which saw many migrating in from "Canara, Mysore, Coimbatore, Salem, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Ramnad, Trichinopolly Cochin and parts

of Malabar […] When the scope for new plantations increased in Wayanad a lot of Europeans [also] began to immigrate to this Taluk" too (Mathew, 2006, p. 734).

The post-independence era saw a heavy influx of immigrants settle in Wayanad by either purchasing or leasing land from rulers, *jenmis* or landlords, or by working as labourers in the fields, as the coffee, tea, cinchona and rubber plantation industries continued to be one of the prime capitalist and revenue generating occupation of the hill. Lands were sold through verbal exchange by the Adhikari to the wealthy immigrants who arrived by trains and buses. Undergrowth was set on fire, trees were cut and settlements were cleared to make forest land fit for cultivation. Tomy has reflected the allurement of the land among the immigrants through her characters, as embodied by Varky's family, who was "ready to tackle any job, however hard […] trusting the rich earth to reward their efforts," who sold all that they had in the plains to buy meagre pieces of land in Wayanad, not reckoning "on the wind and the rain, the wild boars and the elephants, the rice weevils and the insects" (Tomy, 2022, p. 97), but with plain dreams of building a fortune in the land of haven that would eventually push them to debt or suicide.

On the other hand, those who purchased large lands, saw the natives as barbaric and lacking of civilisation and took pride in their humanising charities of building churches, markets and making a parish out of the land that was once their home. This is portrayed through Ivan, a second-generation immigrant, as he recollects this,

> When my father, Anjilikkunnil Kochouseph, took smoke-belching trains and buses and came to Malabar from Pala, all that was here was the deepest, darkest forest. He didn't acquire these hills by the grace of the church, but because he paid cash-money for them. The trouble he went through to build a parish here [...] Not one priest would come to this place. (Tomy, 2022, p. 55)

All the while, the natives evicted from the land continued to serve their new masters, with no changes or abolishment made to the bonded labour system until it lasted.

3. Subjugation of People

Even post the abolishment of slavery in 1976, the plight of the Adivasis dragged strenuously as their ownership kept shifting between new masters and landlords, all the while estranging them further

from their land. Despite possessing the will to leave the bond post its abolishment, many continued to labour as the influx of more immigrant landlords and labourers stirred fear of unemployment and alienation from the land amidst them (Santhosh, 2008, p. 70). Taking advantage of their willing service, the landlords benefited by paying them wages below minimum limits with "a piece of coarse cloth for the Valliyoorkaavu festival, seven and a half seers of rice, five rupees as bond money, and a couple of meals a year" (Tomy, 2022, p. 31) making a cost-effective system out of their labour. Lands were extorted from the families of those who were indebted to the landlords and were unable to pay off their debts; while others, psychologically pained, committed suicide fearing being made to "work as a slave […] for the rest of his [their] days, do as […] told - cut sandalwood from the deep forest, get arrested, [or] be beaten" (Tomy, 2022, p. 113).

Merely seen as "workhorses that serviced their lands" (Tomy, 2022, p. 188), the Adivasis were treated with indignity and called names such as *thoo* (the word represents both the action and the sound of spitting contemptuously at someone as a form of disrespect), imbeciles, pig and "slimy good-for-nothings" (Tomy, 2022, p. 313). They were treated as inferiors from lower castes which can be observed through the episode of Peter, a third-generation immigrant, marrying Lucy and bringing her to the Anjilikunnil House: "'Well done,' Ivachan's voice tumbled over them. 'Ho! Look, how well suited! My darling son has brought us a kitchen maid! What, didn't find a better one in the Paniyar paadi? A Koori or a Mara […]?'" (Tomy, 2022, p. 78).

While landlords considered it shameful and embarrassing when the Adivasis that "wielded hoes and sickles" in their profiting fields (Tomy, 2022, p. 176) revolted or raised their hands against them, they took advantage of the Adivasi and immigrant women by either molesting or wooing them with "fragrant soaps, new clothes and chewing tobacco", luxuries that were beyond their reach (Tomy, 2022, p. 101). The shenanigans of Luca, the *Kochumothalali* (the young landlord), with Kali, a mentally disturbed woman, Aishu, a juvenile, and Salomi are instances given by Tomy that stand testament to the same. The discrimination extended amongst the children and teachers at schools too. Many children, coming from the land-owning families, refused to sit with the Adivasi children under the pretext of odour. They, who merely attended school for the free midday meal of *kanji* (rice porridge) were refused to be served with festive foods and were made to fear everything. Teachers were also reluctant to

specially cater to them as the "snot dripping from the children's noses, their matted hair, and their clothes smelling of dirt" (Tomy, 2022, p. 236) filled them with disgust.

4. Subjugation of Land

Tomy graphs the capitalist plunder of land as a practice dating beyond contemporary times. On the steady transfiguration of the land, she notes,

> Eventually, the scent of cashews faded, and in its place, the rousing fragrance of coffee wafted across the land. Ripe coffee barriers fell like coral beads across the leaf-littered hillsides, heralding another time of plenty. More things came up the hills - rubber, black pepper, ginger - and through it all, paddy fields in shades of green and gold lay fecund in the valleys, ushering in harvest seasons smelling of kaima rice. Hillocks of tapioca revelled, quickening the heartbeats of Kalluvayal, and the people of far-hill and near-hill got together in the light of Petromax lamps to celebrate the tapioca harvest. (Tomy, 2022, p. 2)

While the lands cleared off Adivasi settlements were used for cultivation, the untouched forest lands became sites of illegal smuggling. Taking advantage of the delay of police's arrival, rosewood, teak and sandalwood were felled and smuggled in broad daylight through lorries. Marauders dressed like soldiers came loaded with ammunition to disperse natives who would resist the felling of timber by coming "armed with spears, bamboo sticks and sickles" (Tomy, 2022, p. 150).

Though the mutilation of land was an activity exclusively confined to the landlords and big businesses, the entrapment of the locals into materialist nets gave it a great boost. The very first instance of materialism in Kalluvayal is suggested through the sons of Umminithara who left the village to work as hunters and labourers in estates. Enticed by the basic amenities such as soap, tobacco or the arrack, few natives sided with the landlords and became accomplices in their crimes which are brought out through the characters of Othennan and Vellan in the novel.

The mirage of opportunities posed by capitalism paved the way for vandalism to continue under the screen of tourism. The very first of it was through the vain promotion of pilgrimage tourism, as ideated by Othenan and Jitendra, who were caught in the webs of religion and wanted to make money

through it. However, proper plunder began with the construction of resorts in places where cultivation and settlements were. The extent of which is said as,

> The true owners of the land were chased away as the settlements of the Paniyar disappeared under heaps of mud. In a matter of days, more forest than Kalluvayal's own timber thieves had ever destroyed disappeared. The forest forgot how to cry, as animals scrambled to find shelter and birds flew madly around looking for roosts. (Tomy, 2022, p. 310)

Forest and reserve lands were bought by officials and political-party leaders, as claimed by Tomy, through means of bribes, under the names of dead soldiers or Adivasis claiming that the purchase intended to develop the area through tourism. Though most natives protested against it, a few worked as brokers and agents and smoothly facilitated the deal. Amidst them, a few, including young graduates, were convinced that they would gain employment in the booming tourism sector and silently anticipated its functioning. Though Wayanad initially saw a flooding of tourists, it gradually decreased as the place that was once "lined with whole thickets of bamboo, their tips meeting above to form a green tunnel" reduced to be covered with flyblown garbage of "rotting pieces of paper, sweet wrappers, plastic bags, bottles, condom packets, [and] globs of phlegm" (Tomy, 2022, p. 356). Thomichan, comments on this as,

> And why wouldn't it? They were coming to see the forests of Kalluvayal, but there's no forest to see here, is there? Only the townships built on forest land! The air and water are poisoned, the earth scorching in the heat, the streams all dried up. What's left to see? What's left to experience? Even the migratory birds have disappeared! (Tomy, 2022, p. 321-322)

This further worsened with the exploitation of the tribals through the creation of "a market for 'wellness treatment' and herbal medicine, a mafia that had appropriated the traditional knowledge of the forest people and recruited people […] [by] paying them a pittance for their services" (Tomy, 2022, p. 322).

The continuous profession of materialist plunder also instilled a capitalist attitude amidst the landlords and those in power, for whom the land that provided them with all wealth was just a "forsaken jungle" (Tomy, 2022, p. 54). Illegal smuggling, land reclamation and tourism were followed by the "dredging of the riverbed [that] had left bottomless pools under the sluggish surface of the water"

(Tomy, 2022, p. 341), construction of roads that caused frequent landslides, construction of dams and granite quarry and selling of the riverbed to build a parking lot for the tourists' vehicles.

5. Awareness, Resistance and Control

"Developing an adequate co-creative capability to allow for socially responsible action is of critical importance in the current climate of swift changes" says Vyas et al., (2012, para. 1) on the need for awareness. Awareness among the natives in Wayanad who were suppressed and bound as serfs, happened primarily through two modes: the spread of communism and through the activists of Kanavu School, represented in *Valli* as the Kadoram School.

Communist Varghese and his ideologies acted as seeds of awareness among the natives until his death in 1970. The prime concerns of his ideologies centred on obtaining fair labour and living wages for the Adivasis. Denying any knowledge of serfs bonded to the land they bought, the landlords feared that the ideologies of Varghese would instigate the Adivasis and make them rebel against them. This is suggested through Pokkirmukku Kariyachan, a landlord, when he utters, "Good that their leader Varghese is gone. The rest of them won't dare to do anything now" (Tomy, 2022, p. 29). The Kadoram School was an evening school that functioned to cater to the basic educational needs of the local students in their mother tongue. It aimed to preserve the culture and language of the natives, which the activists claimed to be the foundation of their identity and further growth. This is observed when Padmanabhan says,

> But let them learn to speak their language and sing their songs without feeling ashamed, as loud as they can for the mountains and the rivers to hear, for the forest to bloom. And from there, they can go to the world beyond their language that has no script. One day, Kalluvayal will be proud of these children of the forest. (Tomy, 2022, p. 140)

While the initial protests were demands of fair labour and pay, over time it shifted to land allocation. The very instance of Ivan recollecting the restlessness of his father "worrying […] that somebody might come some day and say, this is not your land. That they would order him to leave" (Tomy, 2022, p. 58) implies that the landlords were aware of the rights the Adivasis had over the land

that they owned. Their demand was further strengthened with the Land Reformation Act of 1969 which was unfruitful to them and the promotion of tourism in the area.

Awareness was spread through street plays, assembly speeches, formation of a group comprising the youth to guard the forest, as sermons through the aid of a few Fathers at churches and through cultural programmes during festivals. The song sung by Basavan stands as an example for one,

> Tell us, how did we become slaves?
>
> Tempting us with rice and paddy,
>
> Who caught us in their nets?
>
> Masters, landlords...
>
> You who work us from shrine to shrine,
>
> Trap us with tobacco and booze,
>
> Sell us like cattle, like tools, like so much produce,
>
> Which god gave you these rights?
>
> Which god gave you these rights? (Tomy, 2022, p. 143)

Irrespective of the means by which they demanded their just rights, their uprising and demands were always cut off: they were silenced by the power of fear induced in them. Those who managed to "break the bond and go and work elsewhere, […] [had] to suffer what happened to Mooppan's son, Mallan" death or disappear mysteriously (Tomy, 2022, p. 31). With the support from the local police, the landlords managed to exploit them by inciting in them the fear of being slapped, kicked, beaten or made to disappear, which as Moopan says has been the "normal state of affairs" (Tomy, 2022, p. 23). Settlements were set on fire as revenge and used as "a curtain to hide the poaching, the cutting down of trees, the ousting of people" (Tomy, 2022, p. 153). The landlords continued to commit hideous crimes as only fewer cases were filed against them, and those filed were dropped as "no one stepped up to bear witness […] scared, terrified that worse things would happen to them" (Tomy, 2022, p. 161). Those that aided and kept the Adivasis aware and organised were conspired against, arrested or brutally beaten up under false accusations.

Despite such control, the Adivasis have frequently protested for their rightful claim for land and employment opportunities on many occasions. The Ayyankali Movement in 1893, the Muthanga

incident in 2003, Aralam protest in 2006, agitations at Chengara, Puyamkutti, Perinchamkutty, formation of the Adivasi Welfare Forum and then the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha in 2001 are a few significant ones that have strengthened their demands. The same has been documented comprehensively by P.T. George (2014) in his seminal article titled *The Promised Land: Adivasi Land Struggles in Kerala*.

The Mau Mau uprisings in Kenya between 1952 and 1960, the Dolores Huerta Labor Union Strikes in 1965, the Chipko movement in India against the logging and clearance of the forest land in 1972, the Save Hasdeo forest in contemporary India protesting against the expansion of the coal mines in Chhattisgarh, India outbursts are a few similar examples to the agitations of people against the encroachment of land legally entitled to them or that have been exploited beyond replenishment by capitalist endeavours.

6. Conclusion

Tomy (2022) rightly says through Padmanabhan: "the dichotomy between nature and capitalism, between greed and need [...] this is what will shape the future" (p. 144). The capitalist appetite among the wealthy landlords has driven them to turn a blind eye towards subjugation and the plight of the Adivasis, who unlike their "freshly laundered and indigo-dipped cotton towel[s]" (Tomy, 2022, p. 52) wore "short mundus and colourless towels […] [and] chelas bound across […] with their shoulders exposed" (Tomy, 2022, p. 74) and were barely making a living out of the wages paid to them. The exploitation of land not just pushed the wildlife deep into the woods, but also caused irregular rainfall, dried the river Kabini, caused conditions of drought and flood and thereby adversely damaged the local ecosystem and made it prone to climate change catastrophes.

The social representation of the Adivasi struggle has also been inequitable. The media has focused either on their strata in the society or portrayed them as extremists, while the academia has seen them as objects of study and research. Though the fervour of the protests has not fallen, many educated young adult Adivasi population, as represented by the children of Basavan, seem to show less interest towards the protests either because they see it beyond their means to beget their demands through protests or because they are enslaved to the illusions of materialism, having "forgotten how to dream

big" (Tomy, 2022, p. 379). Additionally, the lack of suitable climatic conditions, the fall in prices of crops and the lack of favourable schemes has caused many natives to migrate elsewhere to work as labourers. With only very few lands allotted, in some cases–less than promised, in stony and uncultivable locations–the Adivasis continue to protest for their lost sustenance till date.

Valli, hence, has acted as a powerful tool in raising awareness through vivid depictions of the lived experiences of the Adivasis and the need for policy intervention, and also has helped shape the public discourse by highlighting the systemic oppression faced by the marginalised community down the generations and their continued struggle against capitalist development and resource extraction. Such exploitations not just contribute towards the marginalisation of indigenous populations, but also the deterioration of the ecosystem and ultimately paves the way to a climatic crisis. Further studies on tribal experiences and voices focusing on the exploitation of land and resources, shall aid in gaining a deepened understanding of the issues faced by the tribals, and create a more just, eco-conscious and equitable world.

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