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Title: Panchayat Raj Institutions and Tribal Governance in a Non-Scheduled Region: A Study of Edamalakudy Tribal Village in Kerala

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Abstract:

ABSTRACT Edamalakudy, the first tribal Panchayat in Kerala was formed during the delimitation of the local self-government bodies in 2010 by the Kerala Government. The new administrative unit was carved out from the Munnar panchayat and is the only tribal settlement panchayat in the state. The current research is a micro-level study of the political and economic transformation of the Edamalakudy tribal locality. Such a panchayat raj institution meant only for the Muthuvan tribes is the first attempt in a non-Scheduled area in India. Tribes in non-Scheduled areas are facing an extreme rate of poverty, illiteracy, exploitation by outsiders, land alienation, starvation deaths, and other social ills. The democratic landscape requires a more inclusive mechanism of democratic institutions rather than the mere political participation of marginalised people in electoral politics. There is no policy for recognizing tribal cultural identity in local democracy in non-scheduled areas. This research also examines how the policies of the state influence the citizens who are living on the margins of society by studying a tribal locality like Edamalakudy. India has been undergoing political transformation characterised by a higher rate of grassroots political participation and political engagement. However, even today a large number of marginalised people are away from the active political participation and responsible decision making in India amidst these panchayat and local democratic institutions. The research examines the negotiations and conflicts between the traditional political system and the modern secular political system in Edamalakudy. The Edamalakudy is a single identity governing body geographically and culturally isolated but politically assimilated to mainstream forms of local self-governance. In its functioning, Edamalakudy Tribal Panchayat highly relies on 'Muthuvan consciousnesses'. Here, Edamalakudy provides another model of tribal governance applicable for 'one panchayat for one community settlement'.

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