

Subjectivity, Belonging, and Performativity: Adivasi Land Struggles in Kerala, India

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ABSTRACT: In postcolonial Kerala (India), Adivasis (the indigenous communities) have been entrenched in a legal discourse on the restoration of their alienated land, which they had lost to the migrant settlers (non-Adivasis migrated from other parts of Kerala to Adivasi settlements, encroaching their land). In the neoliberal period (after 1991), marking a historic shift, the Adivasis initiated an unprecedented socio-political mobilization for land, premised on their indigenous identity. These protracted land struggles have enabled the Adivasis to reconstitute their political subjectivity reflexively and emerge as a socio-political formation. Performing Adivasiness have been central to the way the movement has been seeking to embed the indigenous identity and construct a politics of belonging. My research interrogates the dynamics and processes that are constitutive of Adivasi subjectivity and how their land struggles are reworking the democratic fabric of Kerala. In this presentation, I would like to draw on my empirical data to argue how Adivasis have inadvertently used the depriving elements of their marginality as resources for their relentless struggle for land and in turn have reconstituted their political subjectivity.

KEYWORDS: Subjectivity, belonging, Land struggles, Indigenous politics, Reflexivity