



Socio-Economic Status of Kaani Scheduled Tribes in Kaniyaumati District, Tamilnadu State, India

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ABSTRACT

Lifestyle of Kaani tribes encompasses a variety of aspects. The scope of the present study was to find out the socioeconomic status of the community living within the forest and those who have moved out to the surrounding villages and towns. Kaani women are involved in selling of herbs and plants that are available near forest boundaries. Organic compost is used for the agriculture. The forest serves as valuable sources for the economic activity. Collection of minor forest produce is a daily routine for them. Although agriculture was seen to be the most major employment, very few adult women were occupied in agriculture for their source of income. The present study was confined to adults' age range 25 – 45 as it would reflect the influence of their food culture and environmental factors. Special attention is required to know their current situation to focus on development of the tribal areas and tribal peoples.

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Introduction

Anthropologists were the first to study tribal culture and they defined “tribe” as people sharing some social relation with distinct area, vernacular, culturally similar and integrative communal group (Harris, 2001). Tribals are a cluster of ethnic decent families or cluster of ethnic decent families having an identical name, who possess the same demesne, speak the same language and observe certain religious or social custom in marriage, occupation and have established a well-determined system of mutuality and reciprocity of moral and legal bounds (Majumdar, 1958).

The Census 2001 reported that out of 102.9 million of the country's total population the Indian tribal population is 12.19 %. Primarily tribals in India inhabited in inaccessible areas like forests, hills and plains which lead them to survive in varied geo-climatic and ecological conditions. In view of their habitat and food habits, they form a distinct group compared to other populations (Census of India, 2001).

History of Kaani Tribes

The traditional livelihood system of tribal people (also known as adivasis) has been based on shifting cultivation and collection of edible forest produce. Kaanikkars are also known as Kaanikkaran or Kaani. The general name for tribes in Kanyakumari area is 'Kaani'. The word Kaanikar means hereditary proprietor of land. The term 'Kaan' meaning Kaatu (forest) becomes the origin of the word so this shows that Kaani tribes are people who live in forest. This has been evolved to get the term Kaani.

The Indian tribal communities namely Chenches, Koya, Kaanikar, Irula, Badagern Karar, Yenadi, Urdu, Muthuvan etc, have the genealogical trace of the Proto Australian racial stock and have the language of the Dravidian family whom are still living in the interior forest areas and traditionally their major profession is collecting naturals like honey, fruits and plants which have medicinal values. They use the plants found in their local areas to cure various ailments or disease.

Their knowledge of medicinal values of such plants are handed down from generation to generation as a domestic practice. They also cure conditions like hepatitis, cancer, poisons and mental diseases (Sasidharan, 2004).

Historically all medicinal preparations were derived from plants, whether in the simple form of plant parts or in the more complex form of crude extracts, mixtures, etc. The primary benefits of using plant-derived medicines are that they are relatively safer than synthetic alternatives, offering profound therapeutic benefits and more affordable treatment (Iwu et al., 1999).

The study by Ayyanar & Ignacimuthu (2011) revealed that traditional medicines were still in common use by the Kani tribal communities and accurate knowledge of the plants and their medicinal properties were held by only a few individuals in this community. Hence a need for detailed investigation of ethnobotanical knowledge held by each tribal community is required before such valuable knowledge vanishes.

They have their own special lifestyles, culture, customs, traditions and religious practices. Their history can be traced only through their oral transmission of tradition and religious practices (Mathew et al, 2016). Among the notified tribes, some groups are still at most primitive stage. They continue to live in isolated areas and practice either primitive agriculture or no agricultural practice and most of them are still in food gathering stage with almost stagnating population. Baseline information on the tribal population which includes demographic, geographic, cultural, agricultural, and socio-economic characteristics is an important feature as it helps to shed some light on the constraints and forecast for the development of tribal community.

In Kerala, Kaani people mostly live in the eastern section of Trivandrum district. In Tamil Nadu, they live in the western section of Kanyakumari and in the northern section

of Tirunelveli district. Kaani are one of the oldest aboriginal tribes of Kanyakumari. Kanyakumari is a large district that contains multiple distinct ecological regions. Plants, animals and fish are available for use as food differs by region and even between neighbouring villages. The tribes inhabiting the remote and secluded areas, depend exclusively on natural forest and sea resources and are not affected by exploitation from the non-tribes. The rest of the tribal groups living in the plains and close to the rural non-tribal people and are exposed to various degrees of exploitation (Vijayan, et al., 2007).

Need of Study

Tribal communities are isolated from the general population and are socially and economically disadvantaged. A general feature of the tribal population of the country is their exclusive geographical habitat. In view of their habitat and dietary habits, they often distinguish themselves from other population groups. The role of the tribes is vital in the preservation of the culture and nature around them.

Search of the studies on Kaani tribes and the use of medicinal plants were undertaken in the past, however, there were no studies regarding socioeconomic status of Kaani tribes. Therefore, the present study was involved in finding out the economic status and agriculture of Kaani tribes.

Socio-economic Status of Kaani Tribes

A structured pre-tested interview schedule was used to elicit the information on the socioeconomic status, income sources, food consumption pattern, nutritional status, cooking habits and traditional health practices among participants.

Individual's financial and sociological condition is measured under Socio-economic status (SES). It is a complex evaluation measured in a range of ways that based on income, education, and livelihood account for a person's work experience and relation to others in social position (Erreygers, 2013).

Socioeconomic status (SES) is usually classified under low, middle, and high and used to determine the class level economic status of an individual or group. Several component that can be affected, including: general health and welfare; physical and mental health. Often, tribal communities and most racial minorities straightforwardly feel the impacts of low socioeconomic condition. Individuals with physical or mental incapacities, and in the old age, are additionally vulnerable communities (Gururaj et al., 2015).

Socio-economic markers give a foundation of understanding on health and nutrition situation in the community. This section on Socio-economic markers gives information on education, gender, neediness, housing, pleasantries, employment and other monetary indicators. These pointers will help in recognizing the linkage between socio-economic status and health of the Kaanis. Data on socio-economic status of the participants included age, occupation, type of houses the participants live in, and data on monthly income status of the family.

Table 1. Income sources of Kaani Tribes

Sl. No	Income generating activities	Forest Area		Rural Area	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	Agriculture	91	50.6	19	10.6
2	Forest work	56	31.1	0	-
3	Collecting honey	18	10.0	33	18.3
4	Cottage industry (rubber estate, cashew factory)	15	8.3	128	71.1

Table 1 reveals the income source of all the 360 respondents. Out of the total 180, 91(50.6 per cent) of the respondents have an occupational background namely agriculture followed by 56 (31.1 percent), 18 (10.0 percent) and 15 (8.3 percent) of the respondents in forest area tribes have forest work, collecting honey and cottage industry. One of the least occupations is cottage industry work. These state that the important income source among the forest area tribes is agriculture. In rural area total 180, 128 (71.1%) income source is cottage industry work, followed by 19 (10.6%) agriculture, 33 (18.3%) collecting honey. Majority of respondents in forest area tribes income source is depend on cottage industry work.

In the past, the main occupation of Kaani tribes was cultivation and collection of forest produce. Even today, they collect the foods for their own consumption and sell them in the nearby villages. Kaani women are involved in selling of herbs and plants that are available near forest boundaries. Organic compost is used for the agriculture. The forest serves as valuable sources for the economic activity. Collection of minor forest produce is a daily routine for them. Although agriculture was seen to be the most major employment, very few adult women were occupied in agriculture for their source of income.

In the present study, we found that women, men and young adults have learnt to make use of the facilities provided by the local administration, Government and NGOs to make life more comfortable than it was 20 years ago.

Government of India, while preparing a report on the Socio- Economic and health status of tribal communities of India found that a majority of tribal group work in the primary sector, and are dependent on agriculture or as cultivators (Ministry of tribal affairs 2014). The tribal societies all over the world use an enormous range of wild plants and they live mostly on forest products and on some cultivation (Razia, 2013).

Due to impact of climatic change, many tribes migrate seeking manual labour in the neighbouring towns and districts of Tamil Nadu and state of Kerala state to meet their basic needs for economic and social survival. Raut et al., (1992) conducted a study on employment, income and expenditure pattern of tribals in Nasik and reported that agriculture including farm animals was found to be the main source of employment. Collection of forest produce by tribes is main source of employment during summer season.

The level of socio-economic growth varies much between tribal and non-tribal population, between one area to another area; between one tribal group to another tribe; and even among distinctive tribal sub-groups (Tattwamasi and Gayatri, 2014).

Kattunaika a tribal society of people were still hunters and gatherers who lives in kerala but other tribal communities who lost all their properties to settlers and invaders changed to farming and other laborer works. The income options of the majority tribal communities are mostly based on the minor sectors with minimum dependence. . Paddy cultivation was a major source of income for many Adivasi community like Paniya and Adiya who have later shifted to plantation crops like cardamom, pepper, ginger, coffee, etc. (Wayanad Initiative, 2006).

The tribal population of India mostly followed the traditional economy which closer to nature with innate knowledge. On the other word it reflects their merged life with natural resources and forests in their home ground. This does not mean that the traditional tribal economy was in any

way, monotonous. Although other tribal community accepted the life of, similar to the neighbouring non-tribal communities, there are other tribal groups, whose livelihoods are characterized by (a) forest-based livelihoods, (b) pre-agriculture level of technology, (c) a stagnant or declining population (d) low literacy level and (e) a minimum level of economy. A variety of economic activities were followed by the tribes, depending on the availability of resources in their specific habitats (GoI, 2014).

Tribal societies were mainly dependent on the small sectors and on farming and agriculture as cultivators or working as labourers. Currently, most of the scheduled tribal people do not follow their traditional occupation but they depend on small local factories or agricultural labour for their income. This is because of the migration. Over 80% of Scheduled Tribes work in the primary sector against 53% of the general population, primarily as cultivators. However, the number of STs who were cultivators, declined from over 68% to 45% in 2001 whereas the number of tribal agricultural labourers increased from about 20% to 37%, demonstrating increasing landlessness among tribals. Data from the 2011 Census is estimated that, in the last decade, about 3.5 million tribal people are set off from agriculture-related activities to get into the informal industrial occupation (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2014).

According to recent NSSO survey reported that 31.9 percent of all family, self-employment in agriculture is the most dominant source of their income. Among Scheduled Tribes 37 percent of the households' agriculture is the main occupation. Non-agriculture self-employment is the most minimal among Scheduled Tribes (7 percent) than that all things considered (15.5 percent). Likewise, the 'other labour' is the lowest among Scheduled Tribes (13.1 percent) than that all. (14.8 percent) (NSSO Survey, 2012).

"Iruligas" as a tribe in Tamil Nadu are traditional snake and rat catchers. They earn their living by doing 'coolie' work (manual labour). This could be either by working in as workers in the fields of the landlords during the sow and harvesting seasons or by working in the rice mills some do labour in the landlord's house for daily wages. Catching fish is also an occupation in some of the "Iruliga" villages. Some gather fire wood from the forest and sell to the neighbouring areas, get some cash while the others simply get some rice or different food commodities in kind as payment for work (Subhashini, 2007). The Kuki are the tribal group who are the original inhabitant of hilly region consequently, they are bound to be isolated from the mainland as well as development. The Kuki tribal women are mostly engage in agriculture, household chores and maintaining the household (Shrabanti et al., 2014).

The Tamil Nadu Tribal communities are at present-days engaged in occupation ranging from hunting to settled

agriculture and urban or industrial callings. However, agriculture dominates the tribal economic scene in Tamil Nadu and hardly two percent of tribal workers are involved in non-agricultural pursuits (Shankar and Manimaran, 2013).

Kuppuswamy classification is used in urban and peri urban areas, which consider the education of the head of family, occupation of head of the family and per capita monthly income. We used this classification (Table 2) to assess the SE status of Kaanis, and we compared it with the Udai pareek classification in rural areas (Table 3).

Table 2. Socio-economic status of the selected tribes according to Kuppusamy Scale (2012)

Total Score	SE Class	Forest Area		Rural Area		Total %
		No	%	No	%	
26-29	Upper	-	-	-	-	-
16-25	Upper-middle	-	-	-	-	-
11-15	Middle/ lower-middle	6	3.3	11	6.1	17
6-10	Lower/ upper-lower	29	16.1	33	18.3	62
≤ 5	Lower	145	80.5	136	75.5	281

Udai Pareek classification is used for rural areas, which takes into account following characteristics namely caste, occupation of family head, education of family head, and level of social participation of family head, landholding, housing, farm power, material possessions and type of family. B.G Prasad's classification, Standard of living index and poverty line assessment are used in both urban and rural areas. Standard of living indices (SLI) is based on following items: type of house, own/ rented house, own agricultural land, possession of livestock, separate kitchen, types of fuel used for cooking, source of lighting, source of drinking water, availability of toilet, items owned by the family essential gadgets.(Singh et al., 2017).

Table 3. Socio-economic status of the selected tribes according to Udai Pareek Revised scale

Grade	Total Score	SE Category	Forest Area		Rural Area		Total %
			No	%	No	%	
A	≥ 43	Upper	-	-	-	-	-
B	33-42	Upper-middle	-	-	-	-	-
C	24-32	Middle	-	-	-	-	-
D	13-23	Lower – middle	7	3.8	36	20	43
E	≤ 13	Lower	173	96.1	144	80	317

Poverty line is measured under the following Score able Socio- Economic indicators: Size of land owned, Type of house, Food security, Sanitation, Status of household work, source of income, Status of children (going to school), Type of indebtedness, Reason for migration. However, social



Plate 1. Housing – Thatched, Pucca

transformation and fast growing economy have provided the first developed scales ineffective in measuring the SES. Therefore they are constantly revised and updated for use in current situations. Hence, considering present factors two most commonly used classifications i.e. Kuppaswamy classification and the B G Prasad classification has been revised (Gururaj et al., 2015). This revision enables and equips community related scientists in their quest for socioeconomic status. We used the Kuppasamy SE Scale (2012) and Udai Pareek Revised scale for our study. The two scales were used to make a comparison and see if our assessment was correct.

The literacy rate of the tribes has increased from 57.2% at 1991 to 64.4% at 2001 (census of India 2011). It is higher than the national average of 47% of all STs. Male literacy has increased from 63.4% to 73.8% while female has gone up from 51% to 58.1% in 1991-2001. Among the numerically larger tribes, Malayarayan have the highest percentage of literates (94.5%), followed by Kaanikaran, Kurichyan, Kuruman, Marati etc., (71.4%). According to Kuppaswamy status majority of the Kaani tribes comes under lower SE category next to the lower middle class (Census of India 2001).

In our study, most of the Kaani tribal families live in coconut leaf and bamboo houses (Table no 4.5) only 6% of them were found to have brick and cement houses that were provided to them under government schemes. Kaani tribes are so primitive that even today 94% of them were found to have houses with coconut leaf; roof and walls are made up of bamboo and some of the houses are constructed with mud and grass roofing. Water being a basic need was obtained from wells (68%) and river dams (31%). Potable water facility was within the reach of 100 meters. As they do not have

proper toilet facilities, they have adapted to open field defecation. As far as conveyance is concerned 15.2% of them had bicycles; jeep vehicle facilities were provided by the Government Forest Department. Bus service was confined to main road only. According the census of Housing conditions Tamil Nadu (2012) most of the tribes' houses in Kanyakumari were semi permanent and temporary houses.

In the Pearson correlation there is a negative relationship between agriculture and education $r(178) = -.316$ ($p \leq .001$), which indicates that there is a negative relationship between the variables. Water sanitary showed a high degree (93%) negative correlation with employment. Same is the case with education and water sanitary which presented a high degree negative correlation. Agriculture and employment showed a negative correlation (31%). Employment and brick house should positive (63.60%) correlation with employment in forest area. The results suggest that 10 out of 12 correlations were statistically significant and were greater or equal to $r = 178 = +.27$, $p < .05$, two – tailed. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the quantitative independent variables in rural area. In these results, Table 4 shows that correlations were statistically significant that 6 out of 12 were greater or equal to $r = 178 = +.24$, $p < .05$, two – tailed.

Correlation were computed among five numbers scales on data for 180 Kaanis This statistical analysis was adopted to test the hypothesis that there is no difference in the SE status of the Kaanis in the forest and rural area. Among the Kaanis in the forest area there is strong positive correlation between education and employment, followed by both education and employment on house and water facilities. There was a negative correlation between agriculture work and water and house facilities in the rural.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix among the Quantitative Independent Variables (forest area)

Variable	No. of family members	No. in Regular employment	Education status	No. in agriculture work	No. with water & sanitary facilities	No. with brick houses
No. of family members	1					
No. in Regular employment	.045	1				
Educational status	.045	1.000**	1			
No. in agriculture work	.187*	-.316**	-.316**	1		
No. with water & sanitary facilities	.010	.930**	.930**	.294**	1	.
No. with brick houses	-.048	.636**	.636**	.272**	.591**	1

*.Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. Correlation Matrix among the Quantitative Independent Variables (Rural area)

Variable	No. of family members	No. in Regular employment	Educational status	No. in agriculture work	No. with water and sanitary facilities	No. with brick houses
No. of family members	1					
No. in Regular employment	.046	1				
Educational status	-.031	.128	1			
No. in agriculture work	.126	.175*	-.246**	1		
No. with water and sanitary facilities	-.283**	.181*	.090	-.735**	1	
No. with brick houses	-.311**	.169*	.068	-.720**	.980**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

There was a significant difference in the variables in the two groups of Kaanis. So we concluded by rejecting the Null hypothesis and the SE status are different and better when the tribes move to rural areas.

Conclusion

Socio-economic indicators provided a background to understanding the health and nutrition scenario in the community. Kaanis had a very low economic power. Income of the tribe was attributable to marketing of valuable minor forest produce - the main economic pursuit of the tribe. They were also engaged in daily labour. Hence, they were mostly in the lower class of economic status. Those that moved to the rural areas had a slightly higher income.

Comparison of food and nutrition intake by Kaani tribe in forest with Kaani tribes living in rural area indicated that rural group had greater access to food. The study finds that there is only a partial progress in the socio-economic status of the Kaani tribe's people in the Kanya Kumari District.

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